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A WOMAN OF MIND.

A WOMAN OF MIND.

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "LOVE WITHOUT WINGS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, SEARLE & RIVINGTON,

CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.

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A WOMAN OF MIND.

CHAPTER I.

Silvia could not trust to the evidence of her eyes. She turned to Lucy, her face glowing with excitement, for the programme. Yes; there it was printed, as plainly as could be—"Marino Faliero: Mr. Philip Royle." She gazed at the slip of paper in her hand as if fascinated by the name printed thereon, and at the same time she noted mechanically the eloquence and power of delivery that were calling forth continual applause.

"What is the matter, Miss Clevedon?" whispered Lucy Britton, who had not been unobservant. "Have you seen some friends?"

"I have seen one friend, Lucy," answered Silvia, with a light in her eyes that Lucy had never seen there before, "and I cannot get over my surprise. I knew Mr. Royle himself very well at one time."

"What! the gentleman who plays Marino Faliero?" exclaimed Lucy Britton.

"The same," replied Silvia; "but I had no idea he was an actor till to-night."

"Oh, how queer!" cried Lucy. "It's quite like a story, isn't it? And he's so handsome too, Miss Clevedon!"

Here one or two murmurs from the persons round them warned them that their colloquy was obstructing the enjoyment of their neighbours, and they subsided into perfect silence — Silvia watching and listening with a strange, new sensation of pride and pleasure; Lucy, absorbed in the play, soon forgetting everything but the trials and experiences of the hero.

Silvia looked back upon that night afterwards with most pleasant feelings. She remembered how disinclined she had been for the experience, how dreary and dull she had felt at first, how listlessly she had sunk back in her seat; and then came the rush of feeling, of interest, awakened by the sound of Royle's voice, by the sight of his face, by the actual

proof that the man had something in him, and that she had helped to bring that something out. All the incidents of her friendship with him came back with startling exactitude. She remembered innumerable conversations and discussions; the tone of the one letter he had written her returned forcibly to her memory; the very expression of his face on the occasion of their last meeting on the staircase at the opera was present in her mind. And as she listened she found herself continually wondering how it all came about, how long he had been acting, and how far he was known. That he had become popular was plainly proved by the enthusiastic applause that greeted him, and which Silvia felt as an honour to herself. The sensation

was utterly new to her, and was one over which she was destined to ponder at length later on. It was impossible to her to keep her attention on the play itself. Her eyes were on the stage, but her thoughts were far away; and it is to be feared that Byron's fine lines fell on the ears of at least one unappreciative person.

The play was over at last—even a tragedy must have an end—Royle had been called three times before the curtain; and the public had at last decided to allow him to retire in peace, and were filtering out of the theatre.

"I hope you have enjoyed it, Miss Clevedon," said Lucy Britton, as she made her way down the stairs at Silvia's side.

"Very much indeed, Lucy," replied Silvia. "I was delighted to find that the gentleman I knew so well at one time had turned out so clever a man, and I have enjoyed his acting excessively. I am only surprised that I have never seen or heard his name mentioned. I suppose you don't know how long he has been acting?"

"All I know," said Lucy Britton, "is that the gentleman who gave mother the orders had promised them for a long time, and never could get them, he said, because the theatre was so full every night that there were no places given; and he said the success was so great that he didn't know when the piece would stop. There, Miss Clevedon," added Lucy, in an entirely different

tone—"there's the gentleman's name, printed plain enough;" and she pointed, as they reached the last flight of stairs, to one of the posters on the wall which bore the name of Philip Royle printed in enormous black letters on a red ground.

"Yes; so it is, Lucy," said Silvia, smiling. "I never noticed it, however, in coming in."

They set off on their homeward walk in excellent spirits, and Lucy Britton talked almost as incessantly as she had done, two or three hours before, on the journey to the theatre. She insisted on accompanying Silvia to the door of her home, and as they stood side by side on the steps, she said quickly—

"I can't tell you how grateful I am

to you, Miss Clevedon, for coming to the theatre with me to-night. I know that it's great kindness and condescension of a lady like you to go out and enjoy yourself with a poor girl like me, that's only a dressmaker; and I know that very few ladies, if they were in your place, would do it; but I am very much obliged to you, for all that, and am very glad that you came, because you *have* enjoyed yourself, haven't you? and you were pleased to see your friend too, weren't you?"

"Certainly — certainly," said Silvia, heartily, and clasping warmly the hand the girl held out. "I have enjoyed myself thoroughly, Lucy, and am very glad that you asked me to go with you."

Once indoors, in her modest little room, Silvia sat down in a mental whirl.

She was astonished at Royle, and astonished also at herself. She had never believed him capable of the great moral courage such a step as his required, and she was surprised to find how thoroughly she remembered him, and how vivid a pleasure she had taken in the homage of the multitude to his genius. She had not thought of him for months, she said to herself, and yet none of the incidents and circumstances of their acquaintance seemed to have faded from her mind. It was at last with something like impatience that she put her reflections on the strangeness of the evening's experience aside. What did it matter to her if Mr. Royle were or were not successful and happy? She was not likely to meet him again, and there was really no reason

for her to waste another thought on him. Having thus settled matters, Silvia went tranquilly to bed.

She did not adhere very strictly to her lofty resolves, for, during the next few days, she thought of Royle incessantly; and, by the singular chance that almost every one has experienced, he was mentioned to her by several persons in quick succession. Mrs. Burrows, the most influential among the lady patronesses of the Society for the Protection of Workwomen, was the first to open up the subject. A few evenings after Silvia's discovery, the society had a social gathering, at which Mrs. Burrows presided, and in the course of the evening addressed a few sensible words to the young women around her, advising them to work

steadily, and to have regular recreation and good recreation. She encouraged them to go to theatres, and to make a point of hearing the classic English plays whenever it was possible; and then she mentioned Royle as a man of genius, who was doing his best to elevate the taste of the public by his fine rendering of a fine work. Lucy Britton listened intently, and glanced at Silvia with a smile and a nod of the most expressive character.

A day or two later, Mr. Graeme entered the office on some special mission, and when this was disposed of, he said to Silvia, "I hear that you went to the theatre the other night. Where did you go?"

"We saw 'Marino Faliero,'" answered Silvia.

"Oh, indeed," remarked Mr. Graeme; "then you saw the great man, Royle. He is a fine actor, is he not?"

"Indeed, I can hardly say," replied Silvia. "I was so taken aback, when I saw him upon the stage, that my surprise exceeded all other feelings. I knew him very well for the space of a season in London; he visited at my father's house, and at the houses of many friends, and I had not the slightest notion that he had any idea of venturing on the stage. You can imagine, then, how surprised I was when he came upon the scene in 'Marino Faliero,' the other evening."

"So you know Royle, do you?" said Mr. Graeme. "Well, it is an honour in these days, I can assure you! I hear

of whole neighbourhoods full of young ladies who keep his portrait in their pockets, who treasure old play-bills upon which his name is printed, and who linger in the vicinity of his chambers in the hope of catching a glimpse of him. I hope you do not intend to go in for that sort of thing?"

"I should not tell you if I did!" said Silvia.

Mr. Graeme smiled, and said presently, as he stood swinging himself slightly backwards and forwards before the large bookcase, "I'm told that he's a handsome man off the stage."

"But you don't believe it, I see," said Silvia. "However, with all the desire in the world to be agreeable to you, I cannot contradict the statement made

by the brazen tongue of rumour. Mr. Royle is certainly a handsome man off the stage; and—a far more important consideration—he is a man of courage and sense and energy, who cares for something beyond dancing and gossiping, and smoking and flirting."

"So I have found out your weak point, have I?" cried Mr. Graeme, with a penetrating, half-malicious look towards Silvia, who replied calmly—

"I found out *your* weak points very long ago!"

The matter ended with a laugh; but these and similar incidents served to keep Royle in Silvia's mind for very many days after her great surprise in recognizing her quondam friend before the foot-lights.

CHAPTER II.

SILVIA'S surprise was hardly greater than that of Royle himself, when he realized that he had made a mighty success; that people were flocking to see him and hear him; that his name was on every lip, in every paper; that he was photographed and caricatured, and abused and praised unceasingly. He had never hoped for more than an instalment of that which was actually awarded him—an unusual circumstance! He had "taken to the stage," as the phrase runs, because

he had believed that, if he were but successful, he might accomplish some small instalment of good work; he was fired by the ambition of raising the taste of the public, of accustoming audiences to the plays of classic authors, and the immortal name of Shakespeare shone in his hopeful dreams of the future. He was an enthusiast in the matter, and he had worked excessively hard at the cultivation of the dramatic talent he had always been said to possess; he had devoted his whole time to the art he had chosen to follow; and he had braved storms of anger from his father, for which the vehement championship of his brother-in-law, William Dawson, had not atoned.

Laurel Lodge had been the scene of

bitter dissensions during the few months that preceded Royle's first appearance in public, and few men would have cared to withstand the continual reproaches and forebodings of failure. But Royle had a bold, brave spirit within him, and the opposition and discouragement he met everywhere served rather to strengthen his resolution than to weaken it. He often wondered afterwards how he got through that period of his new life. He had no secret hope with regard to Silvia to buoy him up, for, during the later months of his arduous work, he believed her to be happily married to Jocelyn, and he was not undeceived until Christmas night, a week or two before his *début*. He was wont to declare, looking back from afar, that the knowledge that Silvia

was free—was to be won, perhaps, even by him, could he find her—gave him the fresh burst of energy necessary for the first night. He felt a *feu sacré* within him, encouraging him to make an effort; he was conscious of a certain power, and he was strong in his determination to plead no worthless cause, to come before the world in no purely sensational position, relying for effect on leaps and bounds and shots, but to represent some of the fine dramatic figures created by our great authors. He wanted to do some good in the world, by striving to raise the actor's calling. He maintained again and again, in tempestuous discussions with family and friends, that the actor's profession was *per se* a noble one; that the actor had the game in his own hands, so to speak.

It is undoubtedly true that the actor has many advantages in his struggle for fame. He comes to the public himself, relying on no intermediary, and he gets his applause, his reward, fresh from the impulse of those who award it. It is not only a question of watching the papers, of hanging on the utterances of a careless critic; if the reward be worth having, it will come straight from the throats of the people, in the actor's very presence. And the actor who takes to the stage with a sound and earnest principle at heart, who is determined to use his talents to good purpose, who will not consent to amuse the public unless he raise and refine its taste at the same time, who will not lend himself to the popularizing of unworthy heroes or ignoble

sentiments, has a vast field before him. He may be able to point a moral, where the preacher would fail!

Royle never hoped, however, in his wildest moments, for the success which had been his from the very first. The critics assembled to judge him on the cold night, early in January, ever memorable to him, were prepared to resent his every tone and look and gesture. They had heard it rumoured that he was a man of some culture and refinement, who had held his own at a university, and on the difficult ground of good society, and it was generally asserted that a gentleman and a man of intellect and refinement could never win the approbation of the public. The grim silence that greeted Royle's first appearance

on the stage melted gradually, however, until at the close of Byron's magnificent play he received an ovation such as is not frequent from the unenthusiastic English audiences. From that moment his fate was sealed. The papers the next morning gave startling accounts of the marvellous reception given to the English actor, who had been bold enough to make his first appearance in a play by one of the greatest English poets; the manager of the theatre was in transports of delight, and declared again and again, to any one who would listen to him, that he never could have believed that "anything serious would pay nowadays;" and Royle's family, with commendable shrewdness, turned to the winning side, and were as emphatic and overwhelming

in praise, as they had previously been in abuse.

After the first excitement was over, matters went on smoothly enough. Royle was becoming a celebrity, and his father and sisters were growing to be proud of him. The theatre was crowded every evening, and Royle felt himself to be rapidly improving, and to be growing capable of higher things than any of which he had dared to dream before. In all this, Silvia was continually in his mind, in a vague, undefined manner. He was for ever wondering if his name had reached her ears, wherever she might be, if she would be pleased at his success, if she would remember their pleasant friendship; and he could not help feeling, at times, that if, after all, she were never

to share the honours lavished upon him, his ambition could never be quite satisfied.

But the incense that surrounds the successful actor softens many trials that would wear to death a man in a less happy profession. Royle was courted and admired and flattered to so great an extent, that it would have been impossible for him not to have become more cheerful and happy in the continual evidence of his success. Indeed, the influence of the public approbation brought nightly to his ear was so irresistible, that his whole soul warmed to his work; and he was so supremely contented in it, that there seemed to be a considerable chance of his forgetting, and learning to do without, the woman whose words had spurred

him on to work. Yet he looked, almost unconsciously, evening after evening upon the sea of faces rising before him, for that one face he had not seen for what seemed to him so long a time; and evening after evening something like a smothered sigh escaped him as he failed to see it.

He recognized, on many occasions, some of his friends of former days, who came to hear him in utter surprise that a man who had once belonged to their "set" should be able to do anything for himself beyond the confines of the ball-room or the parade-ground; and one evening, about two months after his first appearance, as he was lying on a sofa in his dressing-room between the acts, smoking a cigarette by way of rest, the door

was thrown open, some one announced "A gentleman who insists upon seeing Mr. Royle," and Jocelyn entered.

Royle started to his feet, exclaiming, "I'm very glad indeed to see that you don't want to cut me because of the theatre business, Jocelyn—very glad indeed."

"Cut you, my dear fellow!" said Jocelyn. "I'm not likely to have done that. I confess, though, that I was never more surprised in my life than when I saw your name placarded about London. Acting seemed such a deuced odd sort of thing to take to; it must be such a nuisance, you know, such an exertion. Still, I'm bound to say you have got your reward; for you've made the greatest hit that's been made for

years, and I am sure I congratulate you heartily, and only wish I could play Lioni to your Faliero."

Royle laughed, rejoining, "Indeed, I wish you could! Is this the first time you have been here?"

"Oh no," said Jocelyn; "I have seen you at it several times, but have always been with ladies, and unable to leave them between the acts, or I should have come round to look you up. This evening I am alone in the stalls, and could not resist the temptation of having a word with you."

"You were quite right," said Royle, cordially. "I am always glad to see my friends. Drop in whenever you like. And how goes the world with you, Jocelyn? Are you still prosperous and happy, and unmarried?"

"Affairs go smoothly enough at present," said Jocelyn; "I don't know how far they will alter when I *am* married. I expect that I shall find life harder, especially as the lady will be somewhat difficult to keep in order."

"Then you have some one 'in your eye'?" said Royle, with something like a throb at his heart. "Do I know her?" he added, presently.

"I think you met her down in Hampshire," said Jocelyn, indolently. "She and her mother were staying at Clevedon House, and I believe we exchanged a few opinions respecting Miss Leveson and Miss Clevedon, outside the old Eagle—did we not?—on one lovely autumn morning."

"Possibly," said Royle; "in any case,

all I remember at this moment of Miss Leveson is that she is very pretty."

"Yes, she is very pretty," said Jocelyn, calmly; "and she's an unparalleled flirt, and people say she is very foolish. Still, you know, what does that matter to me? She's very pleasant and agreeable, and won't want to talk political economy before I've had my second cup of coffee at breakfast, and won't know an atom more than I do (she couldn't know less) about the suffrage and the predicament of this, that, or the other class, and the prospects of the agricultural labourer, and the unsoundness of the laws of primogeniture, etc. All I want is a pretty woman to sit at the head of the table, and make herself agreeable to the fellows whom I bring home to dinner. She's

not so foolish as to be unable to hold her own when men talk to her about the weather, and the Row, and the theatre; and I should hate people to have said that I had married a confounded blue-stocking. However, I mustn't take up your time. I suppose you are on again in a few moments?"

"Yes; I expect to hear the call-boy directly," said Royle. "I'm delighted to have seen you, and wish you joy in the future with all my heart. Come in again, whenever you like."

The two men shook hands; and as Jocelyn stood at the door, he turned his face towards Royle, and, with a malicious look, said—

"You have not asked me after Miss Clevedon!"

"Mr. Royle!" cried the shrill voice of the call-boy.

And Jocelyn was compelled to hurry away without the satisfaction of seeing the expression on Royle's face, or of having a verbal answer.

CHAPTER III.

Jocelyn called several times upon Royle after that first visit, not at the theatre, but at the rooms in Jermyn Street, Piccadilly, to which Royle had migrated from those in the riverside street. It seemed as if Jocelyn had suddenly renewed his liking for Royle, and was anxious to cultivate a real friendship. Royle, on his side, could not but be flattered by the young man's evident taste for his society, and there was the charm also of reminiscence hanging about his presence; so he received him cordially

enough whenever he made his appearance, and a great liking grew up between them, in spite of the wide difference in their characters.

It was only a few days before his discovery of Silvia's whereabouts that Jocelyn said to Royle, as they sat smoking together by the window, "By-the-by, Royle, how is it that you have never asked after Miss Clevedon?"

"You asked me the same question before, my dear fellow," said Royle, "and circumstances prevented my telling you that I did not ask because I did not suppose you would have anything to tell me that I should particularly care to hear. However, since you are so persistent, suppose the question to be asked, and answer it as fully as you like."

"The fact is," said Jocelyn, "that I can't say very much about her present condition, for I don't know where she is."

"You don't know where she is?" echoed Royle. "What an absurdity!"

"I don't, on my honour!" said Jocelyn. "She's battling with the world, alone, somewhere; that's all I know."

"There is no very hard battle to be fought where money is abundant," remarked Royle.

"But the thing is that Miss Clevedon has very little indeed; in fact, next to nothing," said Jocelyn, moodily. "You know, of course, the preposterous provisions of her father's will, and——"

"Indeed, I know nothing whatever about it!" exclaimed Royle.

"Well, I can soon set you right," said Jocelyn; and he proceeded to give Royle a short sketch of the incidents attendant on the admiral's death, the will, Silvia's determination, and her rush up to London, concluding his statement by observing—"And now, I have not the smallest clue as to her whereabouts, and can only trust to chance to bring us into collision once more, sooner or later."

Royle did not speak. He sat so long with his head bent, and his eyes cast down, that Jocelyn at last addressed him.

"Are you asleep, Royle?" he asked.

"By no means," Royle replied. "I was thinking of Miss Clevedon, if the truth must be told—of her courage and spirit and daring. Do you mean to say

that she left her home and all its luxuries, and plunged headlong into poverty and work of her own accord?"

"She certainly did," said Jocelyn. "You see, the old admiral forgot how high-spirited she was; and the very fact that she was left to me with the fortune, like a bale of goods, as she herself put it, grated upon us both, I must say. I was very much hurt, at first, at her decision, but afterwards I saw that she was right, and I am sure that I shall get on far better with Amy Leveson than I ever could have done with Miss Clevedon. She said I should view the matter as she did ultimately, and I am bound to own that she spoke wisely."

"But do you mean to say that you have not ransacked London for her

during the months that have elapsed?" asked Royle.

"My dear fellow," said Jocelyn, "what would have been the use of my ransacking London? Supposing I had found her, where would have been the gain? I could not have persuaded her to accept any help from me; she would not have allowed me to do the smallest thing for her. It would have been useless to make any such attempt. There was nothing for me to do but to sit still, and wait until she should come to her senses."

"Well, people have different natures," said Royle, rising from his chair, and walking up and down the room as he spoke. "I simply *could not* have waited tranquilly; I should have worn myself

to death by merely walking about the streets looking for her. In fact, I feel as if I myself could start off now, and walk miles in the hope of coming across her. How you can have gone on with your ordinary life during the months she has been lost to you, knowing that she was alone, somewhere in this great city, and working hard, most likely, for her daily bread, passes my comprehension, Jocelyn."

"It may seem queer to you hot-headed fellows," said Jocelyn, stretching himself, and taking another cigar; "but, you see, I thought over the matter in hand, and came to the resolution that any search and ultimate discovery of mine would do no good. I must own that I have very often felt very anxious

about her, and would have given any sum of money to know that she was happy and prosperous, according to her own peculiar ideas. But I wonder that you have remembered enough of her to care whether she were lost or found, Royle. I should have thought all this kind of thing"—he touched a pile of letters upon the table as he spoke—"would have completely obliterated any impression she had made."

Royle shrugged his shoulders, and did not speak immediately, and when he did, he said, "So the whole of the Clevedon property is yours?"

"The whole of it," said Jocelyn. "I wish it were not. It is of no use to me, and I should never like to make use of the house and grounds—it would seem to

me like spoliation. Now, Amy Leveson takes very kindly to the prospect of falling back upon Clevedon House, and has already planned out several parties of friends to be asked there eventually, and has been at the pains of deciding into which rooms they shall be put. The truth is, however, that I cannot and will not include the Clevedon property in the settlements question. I have quite enough money of my own to live on comfortably, and the Clevedon property belongs, by every law of honour, I consider, to Miss Clevedon. There will be a slight noise in the Leveson establishment when I announce my determination, I expect. Miss Leveson may like me very well, but she is not marrying me only for *mes beaux yeux;* and then

the Mater will resist, through thick and thin, the detraction from her daughter's luxurious future for the paltry sake of honour."

"It is not fair of you to talk in that manner of the girl you are going to marry," said Royle.

"Oh, every one does not 'go in' for the serious side of life," said Jocelyn, with a light laugh. "What's the use of being in earnest about anything? You are only the more punished in the long run. If I had been in real sober earnest about Miss Clevedon, for instance, I should have been in a pleasant plight. She wouldn't have had me, and I might have sighed and moaned and broken my heart, for all she would have cared! As it was, I went to Monaco, won some money, and

returned to England perfectly unharmed. She always complained of my lightness of character, but it has served me some very good turns."

A long silence followed this speech. Royle did not seem inclined to talk, and walked up and down the room thoughtfully; while Jocelyn smoked his cigar tranquilly, every now and then whistling the first bars of some popular music. Royle returned to his seat by the window at last, saying—

"I cannot recover from my surprise at all you have told me, Jocelyn. Miss Clevedon seems to be such a remarkable person, so different from the women one generally meets. I always knew that she was. Still, this last stroke is more surprising than anything I have heard of

her, and I cannot help thinking of it all. Where can she be? What can she be doing?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Jocelyn. "Perhaps, as you are so interested, Royle, *you* would like to ransack London for her?"

"You forget," said Royle, "that you are almost her brother, and have therefore the right to seek her out, while I am only a friend—a friend of one season."

"A persistent one, at all events!" Jocelyn remarked, as he took up his hat and gloves. "I must be off now," he added; "I have to send some flowers up to Miss Leveson for the opera to-night. Keep your spirits up, Royle, and don't waste your dreams on Miss Cleve-

don; she's too clever to be capable of condescending to love you."

"I know what I am about," cried Royle, good-humouredly. "You be off to Miss Leveson, and tell her your chivalrous views respecting the Clevedon property."

Jocelyn laughed in return, and went away with a sprightly, unconcerned air.

The next time the two met, Royle exclaimed to Jocelyn, "Now, Jocelyn, don't come to talk to me any more about Miss Clevedon, because it disturbs me, and interferes with my profession. I never acted so badly since I have been on the stage, as I did the other night, after you had been telling me that marvellous story of her. I couldn't get my whole thoughts into my part."

"I suppose your audience is too select to pelt you with ginger-beer bottles or orange peel," said Jocelyn, quietly.

"The public did not express positive disapproval," returned Royle; "but its encouragement seemed to me tame and sleepy, and as I felt myself that I was not in my usual vein, I said again and again, 'That confounded Jocelyn shan't come gossiping to me about Miss Clevedon.'"

"So be it," said Jocelyn, good-humouredly.

Therefore when, a few days later, he discovered Miss Clevedon in what he termed "a dingy hole near Holborn," he did not impart his newly acquired knowledge to Royle, rightly judging that this second piece of news would disturb him more than the former.

Royle had been considerably impressed by the to him startling information respecting Silvia. He did not tell Jocelyn how deeply he had been moved; how he had wandered through the poorest quarters of London with a vague hope of meeting her; how he had been unable to sleep, or read, for thinking of her; how he had made half a dozen plans for discovering her, and yet scarcely dared venture to put them into execution. Anxious as he was to know where she was, he could hardly take upon himself to seek her out. She might fairly turn round upon him, and tell him it was no concern of his if she were poor or rich, happy or unhappy; and she would only laugh at him if he pleaded his love as his excuse. So the days and weeks passed

on, and it fretted Royle to think that he was, apparently, not nearer the attainment of his paramount desire than he had been during the past year.

CHAPTER IV.

"Now, Effie, what do you want with me?" said Royle, as he reached Laurel Lodge, one hot Sunday afternoon, early in July. "I received your note last night, telling me to be sure to come here to-day, and I have come, as you see. Let us go and sit on the lawn at the back, and you can tell me what you want. You know I have thrown over innumerable tempting engagements for your sake. But I don't regret them, and shall be glad to lie quietly on the grass and listen to your gossip, little Eff."

So saying, Royle took Effie's arm, and they went together on to the broad expanse of greensward behind the substantial house. Once in the shade Effie, delighted to have her brother alone, was running to fetch him a chair, but he stopped her by throwing himself down on the grass, and motioning her to sit beside him.

"You see, Philip, this is what has happened," said Effie, her mind evidently engrossed by one thought. "Mrs. Wentworth, our curate's mother, has asked me to her house several times when she has had some friends to dinner, and each time I have been I have met a gentleman, a Scotchman, who has been very polite and kind to me, and who took a fancy to me, he told me at last, because of my like-

ness to some one he had known and liked a long time ago; which some one turned out to have been our Aunt Effie, mamma's sister, you know, who died when we were children. Let me see; where was I? Oh yes, about Mrs. Wentworth's invitations. You are not sleepy, Philip?" she added, anxiously. "I am not boring you?"

"My child," replied her brother, "your conversation is worthy of Mrs. Nickleby, of immortal fame."

"This Scotch gentleman has talked to me about you, of course," continued Effie, vivaciously; "and he said he should so much like to meet you, and also to speak to you on a little matter of business; and, finally, papa asked him to dine here to-day. He is not very fasci-

nating in his manner, I must own, at times. William always says he is like an olive—not to be enjoyed till you come to the after-taste."

"Is he a young man?" asked Royle.

"Why, I told you that he was a friend of Aunt Effie's, who died when we were children," said Effie.

"So you did, dear," returned Royle; "and you said he was a Scotchman also, did you not?"

Effie nodded.

"Well, depend upon it," resumed Royle, "there has been some wonderful romance between him and your aunt, and he wants to sell me the idea with a view to stage reproduction."

"No, it is not that," said Effie. "I think I know what he wishes to ask, and——"

"Never mind it, at all events, Effie," said her brother, indolently. "I don't care to talk on any matters of business, just now. I suppose your friend will be here soon, so let us have a little short interval of rest. Tell me what you are doing—what you are reading—how you are contriving to pass the time."

"I don't do much, as you know, Philip," said Effie. "I try to help Hester a little, and I practise my music, and that is about all I do. As for my reading, I think I am principally interested in looking through the newspapers for notices of you, and articles about you."

"Thanks, little Eff, for your affectionate interest," said Royle; "but that is not what I meant when I was advising you the other day to make a habit of reading something sound and good."

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Effie laughed. "No, I suppose not," she replied; "but the truth is, Philip, that I can't read any serious books and enjoy them. I don't understand half the words used in the books you recommended. I'm not clever, you know, dear, as some girls are."

Royle smiled at her very kindly as she spoke; and some thought crossed his brain as to the relative value, for the happiness of the possessor, of a simple, modest mind, such as that of his sister, and of a more serious, thoughtful, masculine mind, such as that of Miss Clevedon.

A sudden stop was put to their conversation at this juncture. Mr. Royle was heard calling to his daughter from indoors; and as Effie and Royle rose from the ground, he appeared in the

garden, followed by the Scotch gentleman who had broken in upon the home circle.

Mr. Royle introduced his son to Mr. Graeme with an air of overwhelming pride and elation, and Mr. Graeme gave Royle a specially keen look, before he murmured that he was very glad to meet him. Royle noticed the look, and wondered at it; and several times later on in the day, when he looked towards him, he found Mr. Graeme's penetrating eyes fixed upon him.

The colloquy on the lawn was not of long duration, for the party was soon summoned to repair to the dining-room. At the dinner-table, one or two important subjects were broached.

"Would you believe, Mr. Graeme," said Mr. Royle, addressing his guest,

when the fish was served, "that my son went on to the stage from real independence, because he did not like to live on my money, without working in some way or other?"

"Such a resolution showed a very commendable spirit in him!" said Mr. Graeme, gravely.

"Ah! but the governor didn't think it commendable at first, did you, governor?" cried William Dawson, in his loud voice, and with an emphatic wink towards Royle. "He flared up when it was first mentioned, as if he were going to set the house on fire; but the flame got gradually smaller, until at last we snuffed it out so successfully that now he won't believe he was ever set off burning."

"You take care not to let me forget anything," said Mr. Royle, looking down the table somewhat severely at his son-in-law.

"Yes, I am as good as a wife to you," laughed Dawson, imperturbably.

"But I assure you, sir," said Royle to his father, anxious to prevent any family recriminations, "independence is not so rare as you imagine. I have only recently heard of a case of independence of spirit on the part of a woman, far more remarkable than anything in that line you can say of me. You have heard me speak of Miss Clevedon, have you not?"

"Yes, I think I have," said Mr. Royle; while Mr. Graeme looked straight down at the table, and Dawson exclaimed—

"By Jove! she was the handsomest woman I have ever seen—always excepting my wife, of course."

Which remark was followed by an indignant "William, do be quiet!" from Mrs. Dawson.

"My friend Jocelyn, who was Admiral Clevedon's ward," continued Royle, "tells me that the admiral, in dying, left all his property to Jocelyn on the distinct understanding that he was to marry Miss Clevedon. That is how, by-the-by, young Wentworth got hold of the wrong story that he told us. Jocelyn would have been willing enough to fall in with the arrangement, but Miss Clevedon was not willing; she refused to allow Jocelyn to restore her the fortune, and she came up to London

by herself, to find work, leaving no clue as to her whereabouts."

"What a bold creature!" murmured Mrs. Dawson.

"There's a woman worth fighting for!" cried Dawson. "Does no one know where she is to this day?"

"Not to this day," answered Royle, with something like dejection.

"Her good looks may have led her into trouble?" suggested Graeme.

"Sir!" exclaimed Royle, looking the Scotchman full in the face with flashing eyes.

"No offence, I'm sure," said Graeme, with a sardonic smile. "I'm glad if you really believe that the lady is to be trusted, for I find that so few people believe in anything in these days."

"As to that, I don't believe we are much more unbelieving than our governors were," said Dawson. "The main difference is that we are frank enough to say what we think, and they were not. As for believing and trusting in the women of the present day, why, the mass of them—always excepting my wife, of course—are mere dolls, and don't care a snap of the finger for anything but their clothes and their conquests. But wait till we get a generation of women as brave and intelligent and spirited as this Miss Clevedon seems to be, and we'll trust 'em and believe in 'em as much as you like, and defend 'em and their interests with our last drop of blood."

"Bravo, Dawson!" cried Royle, with genuine enthusiasm.

"I am glad to have heard your opinion, Mr. Dawson," said Graeme, gravely, "and shall not fail to repeat it to several of the intelligent women who belong to my society."

"Now, if you were quick at enlarging on a trifle," said Dawson, laughingly, "you might make a capital little address to your members on 'A Soap-boiler's Views of the Woman Question;' and if you mentioned the firm by name, with an incidental allusion to the amount of business we do, I might send you a twenty-pound cheque for the advertisement, which would go to swell the yearly turn-over of the society, eh?"

"Your society has something to do with women, has it not?" asked Mr. Royle.

"It is designed for the protection of workwomen," said Mr. Graeme, "and I firmly believe it has done some good among the young women working in various trades."

"For my part," muttered Ellen Royle, "I can't see why the workwomen want to be protected. No one forms a society to protect us and all our friends, yet I suppose we are as important as a set of shop-girls and work-girls."

"You are not as important to the community at large," said Royle. "How can you be, since you do nothing, and these girls work hard from morning till night? There are trade interests to be protected, as well as the interests of duty and principle and morality."

Ellen shrugged her shoulders, and

turned to agree with her sister, Mrs. Dawson—who was in a fury at the tone of her husband's conversation—that men gave themselves great airs, and affected to have mighty principles, yet they themselves were the first to get in a wrong groove.

"I gather from your expression of opinion," said Mr. Graeme, addressing Royle, "that you are in favour of the principles of our society."

"I am sorry to say," answered Royle, "that I had never heard of the society until you mentioned it just now, but I may assure you that I am in favour of any principle that tends to protect those who cannot protect themselves."

"Well, I am going to make a claim upon your kindness, presently," said

Graeme, with a smile that was almost pleasant; "and I am not going to ask for a subscription."

Royle expressed a hope that he should be able to gratify Mr. Graeme, little suspecting the form the claim would take.

At dessert, Mr. Royle asked Mr. Graeme if he had ever seen his son upon the stage.

"I must own that I have not," said Graeme. "I go very seldom to the theatre; and whenever I have expressed a wish to hear Mr. Royle, I have been assured that the house was packed, and that all the seats were taken for weeks in advance."

"If you will allow me," said Royle, courteously, feeling in his coat-pocket

for his pocket-book, "I will give you a card of mine, which will insure you admittance whenever you like to come, whether the house be full or not."

"No, no; don't trouble about it, I beg of you," protested Mr. Graeme, apparently quite distressed. "I assure you, I would much rather go independently, and pay for my place, because then I feel quite impartial, you know. The knowledge that an actor has given you your entrance hampers your criticism—much the same as when an author makes you a present of his book."

Royle bowed somewhat stiffly in answer to this ungracious speech, and did not offer any further civility to Mr. Graeme.

The "little matter of business" was

not broached till later in the evening. Graeme begged Royle to speak a few words with him in the library, whence the two men emerged after about half an hour's conversation, having evidently come to a mutually pleasant understanding.

"It's all right, Eff," whispered Dawson to his young sister-in-law; "your brother's reached the after-taste."

CHAPTER V.

"WELL, Miss Clevedon," said Mr. Graeme, as he entered the office of the Society for the Protection of Workwomen the next afternoon, "I think we shall be able to manage the day in the country for the women."

"Indeed!" said Silvia, her face, which looked somewhat more pale and fatigued than usual, brightening as he spoke. "I am very glad of that; but how have you contrived, Mr. Graeme?"

Graeme sat down beside the secretary's desk, and said leisurely, watching

Silvia's face with keen eyes, "I met Royle, the great actor, last night at a dinner, and I asked him if he would read here one evening, and what would be his terms for such an entertainment."

To her intense mortification, Silvia felt her face flushing; and as she glanced anxiously at Graeme, to see if he noticed it, she saw the amused, malicious smile upon his lips.

"I did not know you knew him," she said, hardly conscious, in her embarrassment, of what she said.

"I did not know him until last night," said Graeme. "I have met his sister several times, and on the strength of her being the niece of a very old and dear friend of mine, dead long ago, I made acquaintance with the family, and

discovered that Royle the actor was my little friend's brother. The people are rich and vulgar, but they are exceedingly kind-hearted and hospitable, and I am always sure of a hearty welcome there, which is more than can be said for many more cultivated homes. There is a brother-in-law on the premises, too, whom you would keenly enjoy. To return, however, to the actor. I was asked to dine with them yesterday at the Sunday family dinner, and the great man was present. He's an intelligent and liberal-minded young man, and was very frank and far-seeing in his observations on our society. Indeed, he spoke with such strong interest that I imagined he must be aware of the fact that a lady he had known was concerned in

it; but he assured me that he did not know of the existence of the society until I mentioned it yesterday. At any rate, he promised to come and read here next Sunday evening—Sunday is his only free night—and he would not hear of terms, or of any question of remuneration, saying that the satisfaction of helping a good society was sufficient reward. It's strange, is it not? And I really do not think he could have known that you were secretary here."

"I am wondering why I allow you to say all these absurdities about Mr. Royle and myself," said Silvia, who had now recovered her self-possession, and could look Graeme bravely in the face. "I told you that I had known him when my poor father and mother were alive.

I knew many other gentlemen at the same time; and, really, there is no reason why you should adopt such a strange tone in speaking of this one, among dozens who were in the habit of calling upon us, and coming to our parties and receptions. No one would be more surprised at it all than Mr. Royle himself."

"He might be surprised," said Mr. Graeme, curtly. "From his remarks yesterday, I would take my oath that he would not be displeased."

"The Sphinx is as an open book that he who runs may read, compared to you, Mr. Graeme," said Silvia, good-humouredly. "I am not fond of mysteries, and should be much obliged if you would let me go on with my work."

"You must send out notices of next Sunday's meeting immediately," said Mr. Graeme, quite unabashed at the reproofs administered to him. "I expect and hope that Royle will 'draw' amazingly. I intend to suggest to the committee to-night that the members pay one penny for entrance, while non-members pay one shilling."

"That is rather a high charge, I think," said Silvia. "Why, people need not pay more than a shilling to hear him play 'Marino Faliero.'"

"You forget," said Graeme, "that, to begin with, a shilling only puts a person up among the gods, and that the privilege of seeing the actor out of his war-paint is worth any amount of money to a large section of the public. We shall have the

rooms crammed, I am convinced, and you must send out notices as soon as possible."

"There is one point it would be as well to mention in the notices," said Silvia, "and on which you have not yet enlightened me. What is Mr. Royle going to read, or is he going to read at all? Perhaps he will stand on a chair, and be looked at for the space of an hour."

"He said he would read what I pleased," answered Mr. Graeme, "and I selected Bulwer's last novel, 'Kenelm Chillingly,' as being a good study of our times, and one with which the public is not too familiar. He is going to read several characteristic chapters of the work, and I laid great stress upon the excellence of young Chillingly's address

to his father's tenants on his attaining his majority. Does my selection meet with your approval, Miss Clevedon?"

"One subject is not better or worse than another, in my opinion, when it is a question of a reading," said Silvia; "the form of entertainment is one which is singularly uninteresting to me."

"But you are not going to keep away now?" said Graeme, looking intently in her face.

"Certainly not," replied Silvia, returning his glance with something like haughtiness. "Why should I keep away? I can bear an uninteresting evening, I suppose, with as much fortitude as I have borne many unpleasant things in my life? I must make one stipulation, however, Mr. Graeme, and that is that you will

be kind enough to desist from the playful allusions which appear to give you so much pleasure, and will leave me here in peace at my desk."

"On that evening, in particular?" inquired Mr. Graeme, calmly.

"On that evening, and at all times," said Silvia, her eyes flashing angrily.

"Don't distress yourself," said Mr. Graeme, with irritating coolness. "I had no intention of offending you. I thought you were too sensible a woman to lose your temper at a few harmless observations from a sincere friend. However, I will draw up the scheme of the notice to be sent out, which you must copy at your earliest convenience. Don't disturb yourself," he added, as Silvia was beginning to clear her desk for him. "I

will go to the table over there." And he took pen and ink and paper to a table at some distance, leaving Silvia to continue the work he had interrupted.

After a few moments, he brought her a slip of paper covered with writing; and as he was telling her how best to spread the news of the reading, and advising her to write as many announcements as she could—for although she must wait for the evening's committee meeting to send them off, he was certain of their ratification of his plan—she raised her eyes to his face involuntarily, and he forgot his business considerations and cried—

"My dear girl, you have been crying!"

Silvia flushed painfully again; she could have beaten herself for her own

foolishness; and Mr. Graeme, all his stiffness and uncongeniality gone, asked—

"But why—why?"

"I hardly know myself," murmured Silvia, "and should be unable to tell you. Please forget it, Mr. Graeme. Women's tears, you know, are not worth considering. Let me get to my work."

He finished his directions and left the office, but came back in a few moments to place his hand over hers, and to say earnestly, "I have not wounded you in any way, I hope. You have no trouble on your mind which I have raked up, have you? At least, you would not tell me, of course, if you had."

"Dear Mr. Graeme, if I had some trouble on my mind," said Silvia, "I would, I think, sooner tell you than

I would tell any one. But there is nothing the matter with me, believe me."

And with that assurance Mr. Graeme was compelled to be content.

The week was a busy one with the executive of the society, and Silvia was looking forward to the important Sunday with something like dread. From the evening of her sudden discovery at the theatre, Silvia was conscious that Royle had occupied her thoughts incessantly. She did not know why it was that she found herself recalling their many long talks and discussions, and she did not know why Graeme's banter was specially irritating when he alluded, as he often did, to her former friend. She knew, however, that she would have been delighted to have stopped away from the

entertainment, had she not been positively afraid of Mr. Graeme's remarks should she do so. After all, it need not matter much to her, she said to herself again and again. Royle would not remember her, most likely; he had seen so many people, led such a gay and varied life, since the time when he had known her, that he was not to be expected to retain any vivid impression of her. Then, she had altered somewhat; she was dressed in deep mourning, and he would never dream of meeting her in such a place under such circumstances. Silvia soothed herself with all these reflections as she went to the society's rooms on the eventful Sunday evening, and once there, forgot, to a certain extent, her misgivings in the general bustle and flurry prevailing among the members assembled.

The scene was indescribable. Chairs and benches were being insinuated in every possible corner, not an inch of space was wasted by the far-seeing committee; and as Silvia looked at the rows of seats from her place at her desk, it seemed to her that the rooms would never hold the numbers of people expected to flock there. The members themselves were in a state of great enthusiasm, mainly fostered by their knowledge of Royle's refusal to accept any payment. A group of women had gathered in the doorway, in order to be the first to welcome the great man when he arrived, and others stood about in parties of two and three, eagerly discussing the treat in store for them. At half-past seven the public began to pour

in, and Silvia soon saw a sea of human faces round the one chair and table that stood on an improvised platform of planks. The noise of footsteps was incessant, and it was easy to see that Mr. Graeme's predictions were sound, and that Royle would bring in a welcome sum for the workwomen's day in the country.

It was just upon eight, when she heard a mild form of cheer from the persons gathered together outside the rooms, and knew thereby that Royle had arrived. She saw Mr. Graeme and Mr. Hurst advance to the door, and she bent her head, as she sat behind the desk, that he might not see her, at all events immediately on his entry. Her sense of hearing was preternaturally sharp, for she even fancied she recognized Royle's

footstep among the pattering steps of incomers; and, in a moment, there was no mistake as to her recognition of his voice. She heard him tell Mr. Graeme how a dog had jumped up at him as he stood outside the door dismissing the hansom.

"A big black dog," she heard him say—"a retriever, I should fancy—sprang up at me, and rubbed his head against me, and was in such a state of exuberance, that my stroking and patting had no effect upon him. He would certainly have forced his way in here, but that some one held him back."

"It's our secretary's dog," said Mr. Graeme, quietly; while Silvia, in her mind, apostrophized Tartar severely.

When Royle had taken his place on

the modest platform, and was in his chair, his book before him on the table, Silvia ventured to raise her head and to assume her usual position. He would never notice her now, she thought; there were plenty of persons to attract his attention close by him.

He did not see her immediately; he was talking to Mr. Hurst until it was time for his reading to begin, and then he stood up and plunged at once into Kenelm Chillingly's memorable address to his father's tenants.

Silvia found herself listening at last to his low, musical voice with positive pleasure, and when, presently, he came to a dead halt in the middle of a sentence, she, with every one else, looked quickly up at him, in search of a reason.

And then their eyes met, and she knew that he had seen her. The colour had faded from his face, he was biting his lips nervously in the endeavour to suppress his emotion, and she could see the trembling of the hand that held Bulwer's book.

He was only silent for a second or two, but it seemed like an age to Silvia. She saw Mr. Graeme push the traditional glass of cold water towards the reader; she saw him decline it with a wave of the hand; she saw him raise his head with an involuntary gesture of defiance of the emotion that was overpowering him; and he resumed his reading, in a clear, steady voice, by an effort of will that no one but himself could appreciate.

Royle went through the various chapters that had been agreed upon admirably, and the feminine portion of his audience shed copious tears over the passages relating to Lily's death. Silvia was impervious, however, to any such influence; she had been so startled to perceive the effect the sight of her had had upon Royle, that she could think of nothing else. She tried to listen, but she could not; and when it was all over, and the room was ringing with applause, she could not believe that the evening she had dreaded had gone by so quickly.

It was not long after the conclusion of the reading—the public had nearly gone, and the members were talking and laughing in the centre of the room, the chairs and benches having been

unceremoniously huddled against the wall —when Royle came, with uncompromising directness, up to Silvia's desk, and addressed her.

"Have you forgotten me, Miss Clevedon?" he asked, a world of feeling shining in his eyes.

"There is no possibility of forgetting a man whose name is placarded all over London," said Silvia, smiling.

"If you think of me only as an actor who has made his mark, there is nothing more to be said," said Royle, earnestly. "I had hoped you remembered me as a friend whom you first roused and encouraged to action. I dare not tell you what I think of you, Miss Clevedon; I have heard something at least of your story, and can only say that it is just

what might have been expected from you."

Silvia did not speak, but her glance round the room reminded Royle that the audience was dispersing, and that he must go too.

"Am I never to see you again?" he murmured, in a low voice.

"We are sure to meet again somewhere, sooner or later," said Silvia, with a smile. "Good night, Mr. Royle. Let me congratulate you on your success, and thank you for your kindness towards this society. Good night," she repeated, as he bowed to her, his hat in his hand; and then he joined Graeme and Hurst, and the three men left together.

"That's the gentleman who played in the piece the other night, isn't it, Miss

Clevedon?" asked Lucy Britton, who had been an astounded spectator of the brief interview between Royle and Silvia. "That's the gentleman you used to know."

"Yes, Lucy, it's the same person," said Silvia.

"But I thought you liked him?" said Lucy Britton, wonderingly.

"So I do," said Silvia, with deliberation. "And now, Lucy, I am going home. You can come with me part of the way, if you like; only don't talk to me about Mr. Royle, there's a good girl. Every one has been talking about him throughout the week, until I am quite tired of his name!"

And yet, remembering Tartar's recognition of his old friend, she gave the

dog an extra pat and stroke that night, when she sent him downstairs to his sleeping quarters.

Such are the contradictions in woman's nature!

CHAPTER VI.

"Mr. Royle is not at home, sir," said the obsequious landlord, who waited on his tenants in the house which Royle occupied, and who opened the door to Jocelyn on the day after Royle's reading at the offices of the Society for the Protection of Workwomen.

"Not at home!" exclaimed Jocelyn, in utter surprise.

"Not at present, sir," said the landlord; "but I have no doubt he will be back soon. He dines at four, you know, sir, and it's now just past two."

"I will come in, then, and wait a few moments for him," said Jocelyn; and he went upstairs, and taking a cigar, stretched himself upon the sofa in Royle's sitting-room. And presently, when Royle came in, he merely raised his head from the cushions, and said, "Well, Royle, I am lost in astonishment at the change in your habits. Where have you been?"

"I don't see that it's any concern of yours," said Royle, good-humouredly; "still, there is no reason why I should not tell you. I have been to the Park."

"What, at this hour, and at this time of year?" exclaimed Jocelyn.

"My dear fellow, I don't mean to Rotten Row," said Royle. "I abominate the place, at any hour and at any season. I have been in St. James's Park."

"You, Royle, among the children and nursemaids!" cried Jocelyn. "I shouldn't be surprised if you told me, now, that you had a cup of new milk for a penny. What a fine paragraph it would make for the papers! How the penny-a-liners might expatiate on the simplicity of genius—on the exquisite homeliness of the great actor, that leads him to take a pure glass of milk, where meaner men would call for brandy-and-polly. Perhaps you had a ride in the goat-chaise?"

"Don't be absurd," said Royle, falling listlessly into his accustomed chair by the open window. "I went out because I didn't sleep last night, and I felt worried and tired."

"By-the-by, how did your reading go off?" said Jocelyn. "I suppose your sub-

ject and style were infinitely above your audience."

"No; the people were very appreciative," said Royle; "but, after the first few moments, I entirely forgot my audience, for the most extraordinary thing happened. I was in the middle of my opening chapter, when I glanced involuntarily to the end of the room, where there was a desk; and whom do you think I saw sitting behind that desk?"

"Well, if the society be a workwomen's society of some kind, in Dean Street, High Holborn, you saw Miss Clevedon behind the desk," said Jocelyn, quietly.

"So you knew of it, then?" said Royle.

"I found out Miss Clevedon's whereabouts a few days after we were speaking

about her," said Jocelyn; "but you had begged me so earnestly not to mention her to you, that I did not like to say anything about my discovery, especially as I felt sure that my news would disturb you greatly. I didn't know where you were going to read last night, or, of course, I should have warned you. It must have been deucedly unpleasant."

"I don't suppose Miss Clevedon was much troubled," said Royle; "but the incident upset me for the evening."

"Did you speak to her?" asked Jocelyn, glancing shrewdly at Royle.

"I merely said a few words when the entertainment was over," said Royle. "She did not seem anxious to talk, and I did not wish to pester her."

"I suppose she didn't give you her

address? She seemed disinclined to give it to me at first," said Jocelyn.

"I did not ask her for it," said Royle. "And don't tell it me, Jocelyn; I would rather not know it."

"And I should not think myself at liberty to tell it, in any case," said Jocelyn. After a moment's silence, he resumed, "Is it not terrible to think of her being there, toiling and drudging, for thirty shillings a week? She said something to me about being perfectly happy, and she utterly repudiated any idea of ultimately consenting to take the fortune that belongs to her. I didn't venture to tell her I was engaged to Miss Leveson, and I am very glad now that I did not, for I don't suppose the engagement will hold out."

"Have you been quarrelling already?" said Royle.

"We devoted the whole of yesterday afternoon to a good, breezy dispute," said Jocelyn, lazily. "It was on the settlements question, of course. Miss Leveson was most mortified at my idea of excluding the Clevedon property from the fortune to be settled upon her, and the mother was perfectly rampant. I let them say what they liked, both of them, about me and my foolishness, and want of spirit, and meanness, and so on; but after a time they began about Miss Clevedon. Lady Leveson said she had heard that Miss Clevedon was living in a disreputable back street, and was even reduced to working 'like a common person' for her living; and she threw out a variety

of insulting allusions, so that I lost my temper, and 'kinder flared up,' as Artemus Ward would say. I believe they were rather startled; but I didn't give them time to make any comments, for when I had said what I wanted to say, I told them that, as we were all in deuced bad tempers, it was of no use our carrying on the discussion, and then I made my escape. This morning I had a note from Miss Leveson, informing me that, as town is unbearable at this time of year, she and her mother were going down to Cowes on a visit to their friends, the Mildmays, to-day, and that she hoped to see me there soon. By the same post, I had a letter from young Mildmay, asking me to join him on a yachting expedition. But, of course, I shall not go,

under the circumstances. I shall simply run across to Dieppe for a week or two. North is there, and has begged me to join him; he says the place is full of people, French, English, and American, and there is always something refreshing in the mere atmosphere, even, of France."

"You're a lucky man," said Royle, "in every sense, and especially to be able to leave London just now. I shall be nailed here for a month or two longer, at least, I'm afraid."

"I don't believe you will be allowed to leave London, at all, this year," said Jocelyn. "Still, think of the difference between us, in other respects; you are universally known and admired, while I'm only a poor butterfly, buzzing about a very limited section of society. By-the-

by, Lady Leveson was very severe indeed on you yesterday, and said she was astonished that any man who had been in good society could ever have descended to the degradation of the stage, and still more astonished that I, who had been used to gentlemen, could make a companion of an actor. So I tried to quote Campbell for her benefit, and got safely through the first lines—

> 'For ill can poetry express
> Full many a tone of thought sublime.'

I floundered about dreadfully among the allusions to 'painting, mute and motionless,' and somebody or something stealing a glance at the time—I mean, at time; and Miss Leveson was just about to indulge in a satirical laugh, when I came out with the last verse, and I can tell

you that my style was worthy, I am sure, of Marino Faliero himself. Do you know the lines?—

> 'But by the mighty actor brought,
> Illusion's perfect triumphs come;
> Verse ceases to be airy thought,
> And sculpture to be dumb.'

Lady Leveson said she didn't care for the poetical statements of all the poets rolled into one. That's just like a woman's figure of speech, isn't it? Conceive the quality of the bundle all the poets rolled into one would make! And, finally, she broke up the conversation respecting you, by declaring that you were a handsome man, and that was why you were successful; but that, for her part, she would never have anything to do with a low actor."

"You are a good fellow, Jocelyn," said

Royle, when he had finished laughing. "I suppose we shall have to drop each other, though, when you are married, since the Levesons have such strong opinions respecting me."

"I do not think Miss Leveson will have me if I forfeit the Clevedon property," said Jocelyn. "So that the marriage is not likely to take place."

"It is fortunate that you take things so easily," said Royle. "And now, Jocelyn, it is my dinner-time. If you won't dine with me, you must let me dine while you look on."

"Yes, that will do it," said Jocelyn. "I couldn't dine at four, if a fortune depended upon it, but I can drink a glass or two of wine while you proceed with your meal."

Jocelyn went to Dieppe a few days later, but before he left town he deemed it his duty to see Silvia, and made up his mind to an expedition to Charlotte Street.

Silvia had been singularly depressed since the great entertainment. She had asked herself again and again how it was that she felt somewhat less inclined to laugh with Lucy Britton, to answer Mr. Graeme's jocularities—how it was that she was anxious to be left alone. It was not that she was less interested in her society—on the contrary, she fulfilled her duties with a pleasure that she felt in nothing else—it was not that she regretted her renunciation of fortune, or her loss of acquaintances and so-called friends; it was simply, she said to herself

over and over again, that she felt dull, and was overpowered by the heat. Her most sincere friend, who observed her, however, almost day by day, had a very acute perception of her state of mind, but judged it best not to trouble her with his definition.

She was sitting in her parlour, a few evenings after Royle's reading at the society's offices, absorbed in thought. The window was wide open, and the blinds were not drawn down, for she had not lit her lamp; and in the dim, uncertain light in the streets, she could see the pale-faced children playing on the pavement—the boys excited over marbles; the girls executing the form of graceless dance peculiar to the English poor classes, to the music of a barrel-organ

manipulated by a smiling, dark-eyed Italian. It interested her to watch all this life and movement; she was pleased to see how heartily the children enjoyed their brief interval of play, in spite of the squalor of the streets, the irrepressible gloom of the climate, and the uninviting tenour of their needy existence.

Intense gloom and melancholy are always apportioned to winter by tradition, but there is a summer sadness in the work-a-day quarters of London far more depressing, to many minds, than the aspect of the city even in November. The long rows of black houses; the close mist that seems to hang over the ground; the groups of children clustered about the pavement in thickly populated neighbourhoods; the broken flower-pots, with

here and there a cracked jug full of flowers on the window-ledges; the street cries, the street music, the stifling heat, and the canopy of grey sky above all, make up a twilight scene of indescribable melancholy more saddening than the gloom of winter.

It was upon such a picture that Silvia looked. Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square, under such circumstances, would make the cheeriest heart sink; and as she gazed, by some unaccountable freak of memory, there came to her mind, suddenly, a vision of Lucerne—of the blue lake, with the purple mountains rising on all sides, the smooth peak of the Righi on the left, the jagged crest of Pilatus on the right. She remembered having looked from her window at the

Schweizerhof, one late summer evening —at the magnificence of the scene, the marvellous beauty of land and water and sky; and the peace and serenity of nature beneath those cloudless foreign skies had so impressed her, that the picture had returned to her mind again and again, and never in more dismal contrast than on this particular evening.

She had just turned from the window with a short sigh, and a determination to light her lamp and do some work of some kind, when there was a loud knock at the door. It could not be for her, she was sure, yet she waited a moment while Mrs. Johnson answered the summons.

In a few seconds, Mrs. Johnson brought her in a card, at which Silvia glanced, and asked the good woman to

show in the bearer; and Gilbert Jocelyn walked hurriedly into the room.

"I suppose you are surprised to see me, Silvia," he said, throwing himself into one of the stiff-backed armchairs, after he had shaken hands with her. "The truth of the matter is that I am going to leave London for a few weeks, and I didn't want to go off without letting you know where you could write to me if anything particular should turn up; also, I wished to see you again and hear how you were, if you are well and happy and prosperous still. I can't see how you are looking in this preposterous light, however. What's the meaning of it all. Why does not some one light the gas?"

"I will light the lamp," said Silvia.

It was but the work of a moment; and then she sat down by the table, and Jocelyn drew his chair close to hers, and looked her long and earnestly in the face. She laughed at first, then she moved uneasily, and finally she said, quickly—

"I wish you would not look at me in that mesmeric manner. You make me feel quite uncomfortable."

"I wish you knew how uncomfortable you make me," said Jocelyn, seriously. "You have changed so unaccountably, Silvia; you are not only pale and thin, but you look as if you had been ground down with cares and worries. Is there anything troubling you, in which I can help you? Do you want any help of any kind? Because if you do you ought to tell me frankly. We were brought up

like brother and sister; you have always told me that you loved me as if I were your brother, and you ought to tell me all that vexes you, quite openly and naturally. Do you want money?"

Silvia laughed, and answered him, brightly enough: "No, Gilbert; I do not want money. In fact, to speak practically, I cannot say that I want anything. I am thoroughly content at my work; I like the people belonging to the society, and I believe they like me; and I have made one or two friends among them whom I hope to keep all my life. I can safely say again that I am thoroughly content with my work. I grow dull sometimes—who does not?—and I very often feel excessively sorry that I cannot see more of you, Gilbert

—that circumstances have put us so far apart; but I cannot expect to be entirely free from sadness and regrets. I look pale and thin, you say; but you must remember that I have been accustomed, during the greater part of my life, to country air, and life in town would have had an effect upon me, in any circumstances."

"*Se non è vero, è ben trovato*," murmured Jocelyn, tapping the table with his fingers, and looking round the room as he spoke. "Do you mean to say," he asked presently, after a lengthy survey, "that you have lived in this place nearly a year?"

Silvia nodded.

"Well, it certainly is not strange that you look ill," continued Jocelyn. "Char-

lotte Street itself makes me feel queer for an hour or two whenever I see it, and I verily believe I should be laid up if I had to live in these parlours. They require to be warmed and lighted by a *feu sacré*."

"Nonsense, Gilbert!" said Silvia, decidedly. "You would make yourself happy here, as other people have done, if there were a necessity for such a change; and as for being laid up, the contrast was as great to me, when I first came here, as it could be to you, and I have not been overwhelmed by it."

"But you had a fine supply of maxims, and theories, and opinions to buoy you up, and I should have nothing of the kind," said Jocelyn.

"How have you passed your time

through the summer?" asked Silvia, giving a direct turn to the conversation. "Have you been going, like a horse at a circus, in a dazzling round of the same pleasures: balls, suppers, billiards, opera, garden-parties, and dinners?"

"I suppose I have done the usual amount of that kind of thing," said Jocelyn, indolently. "I have seen Royle very frequently, however, and he has taken up a considerable proportion of my time."

"What! Philip Royle, the actor?" cried Silvia.

"Yes; *the* Royle, your friend and satellite," said Jocelyn. "He's a great man now, and he is really a very pleasant fellow too."

"I should have thought you would not

have condescended to an actor," said Silvia. "What do your friends say?"

"There's no question of condescension as regards Royle," said Jocelyn. "It's a fight in society as to who shall get him, I can assure you. He goes out very little, and takes all the lionizing very modestly indeed. I fancy my head would be turned if I were in his place. You haven't seen him act, of course?"

"Yes, I have," said Silvia; and thereupon she related to Jocelyn the whole episode.

"What a pity he did not know you were there!" muttered Jocelyn, when he had heard the story; "it would have been such a gratification to him."

Silvia laughed. "Well, he had the gratification of knowing I was in the

room during his reading the other evening," said she.

"I know, I know," said Jocelyn; "he told me about it all."

"You seem to be on extraordinarily good terms with him," said Silvia.

"I like him very much, and I believe he likes me," said Jocelyn. "And now to return to yourself, Silvia. Is there nothing that I can do for you before I leave London? Is there nothing you want that I can procure?" He rose as he spoke, and took up his hat.

"Nothing whatever," said Silvia, decisively.

"Will you promise me to let me know if anything should happen in which I could be of use to you?" said Jocelyn, earnestly.

"Yes, I will promise that," replied Silvia, slowly and thoughtfully. "And, Gilbert, on your side, if there should come a crisis of any kind in your life, in which I could serve you, or help you in any way, will you think of me, and remember how glad I shall always be to do for you all that your own sister would have done?"

"All right, dear," said Jocelyn, giving Silvia's hand a vigorous pressure. "It would be rather awkward, though, if we both happened to be dying at the same time, and sent for each other. There would be a study of character, ready for the nearest observer, of the symptoms of self-sacrifice in each patient. Good-bye, Silvia. What shall I say to Royle from you?" he added, as he put the card,

with his foreign address on it, upon the table.

"Nothing," said Silvia, shortly.

"That's kind, and friendly, and encouraging!" said Jocelyn. "You're very much like the most commonplace of women in some things, you see, Silvia. Good-bye. Take care of yourself. I will let you know when I am back, and I will not fail to give your message to Royle. Good night."

And, before she could say a word, he was gone, and she heard the quick sound of his jaunty footsteps as he went down the street.

"What will Mr. Royle think of me?" she asked herself at first, and returned presently to her old standing-ground, "that it did not matter what he thought, one way or another."

CHAPTER VII.

SILVIA's pleasure-ground during the heat of the summer had been the unfashionable tract of land known as the Regent's Park. She had wandered about its pretty paths and byways and avenues on many evenings, when the close air of the streets had been stifling to her. Regularly every Sunday she went, book in hand, and read and thought for an hour or two in perfect peace, under the shadow of the fine old trees that line the central avenue. She was perfectly undisturbed always—her

grave face and the deep mourning she still wore protected her from any unpleasantness; and she grew to be positively attached to her recreation-ground, and watched the variations of its aspects, the reddening of the leaves on its trees, the scorching of its grass, the changes in its flower-beds, with keen interest.

She felt very listless and dejected, however, as she leant back in her seat one August Sunday evening. Her eyes ran over the familiar ground with something like weariness. The masses of people moving about backwards and forwards before her almost irritated her, and she caught herself longing intently for the solitude and calm of her old haunts in the New Forest. She turned at length, with a sigh, to the book she

held in her hand, and had only read a page or two, when a familiar voice cried out to her, "I've caught you at last, Miss Clevedon!" and she looked up with a smile to greet Mr. Graeme.

"I very often come here on Sunday afternoons," said Silvia, as he took a place beside her. "There is something like fresh air here, and there is green to be seen, too."

"There are, perhaps, other equally romantic reasons for your selection of this spot, eh?" said Mr. Graeme.

Silvia smiled constrainedly. She did not at all relish Graeme's continual allusions; and he, of course, seeing that they ruffled her, took special pleasure in making them.

"But, after all," she said, "how do

you come here yourself? Since the place is so unconventional, and requires a romantic interest to induce any one to explore it, why do I meet you here?"

"I don't come here with intention," said Graeme; "my visit is incidental. I am on my way to a friend's, and my road lies along this path."

"Then why don't you go to your friend's?" said Silvia, boldly.

"Because I prefer to stop and pick a quarrel with you," said Mr. Graeme.

Silvia glanced keenly at him, and seeing the expression of his face, said, "I am afraid we shall certainly quarrel if we talk much to-day; so, under the circumstances, it would be better if I went on with my book."

"No; don't read now," said Graeme.

"It will be much better for you to lose your temper over a discussion than to pore over your dry volume. What have you been doing to yourself? You don't look at all well."

"The summer heat is tiring," murmured Silvia.

"The heat is not responsible for the change to which I allude," said Graeme. "You have lost your spirits, lost your colour, and lost the brightness of your eyes."

Silvia laughed with something of her old heartiness. "Really, Mr. Graeme," she said, "I am growing more and more afraid of you. You are as keen as a special correspondent."

"I am anxious to know if there be anything serious the matter," said

Graeme, gravely. "Would you like a week or a fortnight's holiday?"

Silvia shook her head energetically. "No, no," she protested. "I do not know what I should do without my work."

"Don't say that you are not troubled by anything," said Graeme. "It has always been a pleasure to me to think that you were a woman above the ordinary smallnesses of your sex, and that you would not condescend to the petty denials and assertions for which women are famed. I know that you are worried by something. I can see it in your eyes; I can hear it in your voice."

"Well, if you are so sure in asserting your knowledge, you deprive me of all the grace of confession," said Silvia, raising her head and looking at Graeme

frankly. "But I will be honest with you, in any case, and will own that I have the shade, the phantom, of a trouble upon me that I cannot describe, or define, or put away. Are you satisfied now? Is that sufficient for you? To turn the subject: I have wished for several days to speak to you about Lucy Britton, but have had no opportunity. Her subscription has been due for some time. She has not paid it, and she has not been to Dean Street for some three weeks or more. I went to her mother's to inquire about her, but the mother was in one of her intervals of intoxication, and did not seem to understand me. What am I to do? Lucy is so very thoughtless and light-headed, that I am always afraid she will get into trouble."

"I went to see 'Marino Faliero' last night," said Graeme, thoughtfully. "The piece is followed by a humorous skit, in which there are numbers of stage happy peasantry, and among the women I am sorry to say that I recognized Miss Britton, looking very pretty and very unabashed, in the paint and short skirts necessary to the part."

"Lucy Britton on the stage!" said Silvia, almost in a whisper.

"Lucy Britton herself among the supers!" responded Graeme, imperturbably.

"Of course, I don't know how she got there," said Silvia, in a low voice; "but she need not be hopelessly lost because of that. Many supers are perfectly honest and respectable, and live straight-

forward, well-conducted lives, I have always heard. Every one is so ready to denounce the stage and all who are connected with it in every way; but, for my part, I do not see that its influence is so demoralizing, if one may judge from the men who have flourished in its atmosphere. Still, for a girl like Lucy Britton, I am afraid it will not be improving."

"I went round to her mother's last night, when the performance was over," said Graeme, grimly. "The mother was perfectly sober, and told me that her daughter had left home; in fact, had been away for something like three weeks; that she had given her up, and would never forgive her for disgracing herself and her parents. So that's the

end of your little romance about Miss Lucy Britton, who has not dwelt long among the untrodden ways of innocence."

"Ah! but stop!" said Silvia. "We do not know exactly how the matters stand; we have only heard one version of the story. I shall not believe in Lucy's defection until she tells me of it herself."

Graeme shook his head; he was evidently convinced of her backsliding; and then he looked at his watch, and said that he must go.

"Are you going to St. John's Wood?" asked Silvia, carelessly.

"Yes; I am going to the Avenue Road, to Laurel Lodge—to the Royles', in fact," said Graeme.

Silvia smiled. "If I were half as

malicious as you are," she said, "I might say innumerable sharp things about your attentions to the Royles. How is it that you are always with them?"

"I am not always with them," replied Graeme, "and when I am, it is purely from friendship for you. I know that, whatever you may say, you keenly relish the news I bring you respecting them. And, by-the-by, I ought not omit to mention that an exquisite bunch of moss-roses was thrown to Royle last night, at the end of the piece, by a lady in a private box."

"It was from one of his sisters, doubtless," said Silvia.

"You forget that I know his sisters," said Graeme. "I have never seen this lady before, and she was not a person

likely to be forgotten, for she was strikingly pretty."

"I dare say Mr. Royle himself knows well enough who the lady is, and is hugging the moss-roses at this moment," said Silvia, scornfully.

"To be truly charitable, you should wish that the thorns may not prick him," said Graeme. And he laughed with evident enjoyment, as he noted the attempted indifference of expression on Silvia's face. "He's a splendid actor, is he not?" he continued, and without waiting for an answer said, "He is the finest actor I have seen in my time, and I fancy he will make a really great name. He wants to be helped and encouraged, for I think he underrates rather than overrates his own powers."

"He is not likely to be troubled with that failing for long," said Silvia. "And now, if you are going to talk much longer about Mr. Royle, I shall open my book, for really I am tired of the subject."

Graeme laughed again, and rose from the seat. "I am going to leave you in peace," he said; and as they shook hands, he asked, "Shall I tell Mr. Royle that you are in the habit of walking in Regent's Park on Sunday afternoons?"

"If you like," answered Silvia, curtly, making a stern resolve mentally.

And then Graeme left her, and she remained but very little longer in her place, preferring to return to her parlour, and reflect there in peace.

As for Graeme, when he reached

Laurel Lodge, he found that he was somewhat later than he ought to have been. He waited to apologize, however, until they were seated at the dinner-table, and then he said that he had been detained because, in passing through the Park, he had met the secretary of his society; and, as he spoke, he glanced across the table at Royle. But Royle, although he had heard Graeme's every word, made no sign—was imperturbable—and all Graeme's hints and unpleasantnesses could not bring forth a change of colour or a quiver of the lip. His impenetrable behaviour pleased Graeme infinitely more, however, than any weakness could have done, and Graeme felt perfectly sure of his ground at last.

As Royle looked over the letters

brought to him from the theatre the next morning, he saw one addressed to him in a handwriting which made his heart beat. He tore open the envelope, murmuring, "It must be from her," and read—

"Dear Mr. Royle,

"I have heard this afternoon that a girl in whom I take a great interest, and who has been missing from the society meetings of late, is engaged as a super at your theatre. Her name is Lucy Britton, and I should be grateful to you if you could prevail upon any one to give her a few words of kindly advice. She is young and pretty, and will, I am afraid, be utterly lost to good influence soon.

"Believe me to be yours faithfully,

"Silvia Clevedon."

Royle sat motionless, with this strange communication in his hand, for some time, and the result of his cogitation was that he took up his pen and answered the letter.

"My dear Miss Clevedon" (he wrote)—

"I will do what I can for your *protégée*, and will speak to the stage-manager about her. The sight of your handwriting makes me think of a letter I wrote to you, and of an answer which I have treasured for more than a year and a half. Will you let me write to you now as frankly as I did then? That is all I ask

"Yours sincerely,

"Philip Royle."

He addressed this note, marked *private*,

to the "Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Workwomen," and waited. But he waited for many days, and no answer came to him.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was not many days after her meeting with Mr. Graeme in Regent's Park, that Silvia had a note from him at the office, asking her to come down to his business rooms at Chancery Lane, for he wished to speak to her about Miss Britton, and could not leave his quarters. Therefore, at three o'clock exactly, the hour he had specified, Silvia rang the office bell, and was shown into Graeme's room by an obsequious clerk.

"I was anxious to inform you, Miss

Clevedon," said Graeme, after they had shaken hands, "that I have heard of your friend Miss Britton, who is rescued from the clutches of the theatre, for the time at least. I met Mr. Royle last night, and he told me that you had written to him on the subject, and that he had spoken to the stage-manager, who had advised her to return home—advice by which she promised to act."

"Is that all through Mr. Royle's interference?" asked Silvia.

"Undoubtedly," answered Graeme. "You do not suppose that the stage-manager cared in the abstract about Lucy Britton; he must be well accustomed to pretty faces and bold manners, and his only reason for proffering good advice was Royle's recommendation.

Now, the girl has promised to return home, and do her best to obliterate these few evil weeks; so you must look her mother up, and soften matters there."

"You are very kind, Mr. Graeme," said Silvia, earnestly.

"I am sure I don't know why I am, then," replied Graeme, raising his eyebrows and assuming his most discouraging expression. "It's of no consequence to me, personally, whether Lucy Britton goes wrong now or ten years hence; it's not my fault if her parents are perpetually drunk, and she is giddy, not to say somewhat idle; and I really don't see why I should stir hand or foot to help her. It's exciting, however, to speculate on the degree of ingratitude that will be shown."

"I am not ungrateful to you for the kindness you have shown me," said Silvia, in a low voice.

"Your gratitude is not always your strongest feeling with regard to me," said Graeme. "I have given up calculating the number of cross, sharp speeches you have made to me of late. The first time you lost your temper in talking to me, I made a note of it. See here;" and he opened his pocket-book, and showed her a note within, in pencil —"Miss Clevedon was ill-tempered." "But it occurred so many times again, and especially lately, that I no longer think the circumstance worth recording, and have dismissed the subject from my note-book, as you will see;" and he pointed out to her where he had written,

"Miss Clevedon's loss of temper too frequent to be noted."

Silvia coloured; she recognized the truth of his comment. She had been sharp in her answers to him, many times; and, after all, she said to herself, he had been very kind to her, whenever he had had an opportunity.

"But," she remarked, "if I have been disagreeable to you, Mr. Graeme, I am sure you have been very cross to me, often, and have made countless sharp and bitter speeches to me."

"With me, it is a different thing," said Graeme. "It is my nature to be sharp and cross and bitter, and my natural characteristics do not call for any special reproof. But it is not in your nature to be spiteful and ill-tempered; therefore,

when you are so, you ought to be caught up. Now, each time I have displayed my fundamental goodness of heart in trying to bring you and Mr. Royle together—as you seem to have been such great friends—you have flown at me like a vulture. And, really, after all, you ought not to mind what I say about Mr. Royle. I like my little joke, but I do not for one moment intend to infer anything beyond a joke. The facts that he is an actor only, and that you are a woman of good family, are sufficient for me."

Silvia had the greatest difficulty in keeping silent during this speech; and Graeme saw it, and continued—

"I am certain that you have lost your temper again, but you do not like to show

it. It is very singular that any illusion to Mr. Royle should ruffle you so considerably. Now, Mr. Royle himself is delighted when I talk of you."

"I cannot see what you find to say about me to him," said poor Silvia.

"Well, of course, I talk of you as the secretary of our society," said Graeme, "and I have always found him a most attentive listener."

"Perhaps he is only sleepy," said Silvia.

"I assure you——" began Graeme.

But his assurance was arrested by a ring at the outer bell; one of the clerks put his head in at the door, and Graeme said hurriedly to Silvia, beckoning her to a corner and showing her into a little room giving from his large, central room, "Run in there, my dear girl, for a mo-

ment," slammed the door upon her, and Silvia heard him turn, with a few cold, calm words, to the new arrival.

As she was thrust into the gloomy little recess that was hardly more than a cupboard, the tall figure of a man rose from a chair by the window, and Philip Royle sprang forward, his face glowing and his eyes shining, with delighted surprise.

"Silvia! at last!" he exclaimed, seizing her hands in his.

For a moment her eyes fell, and her heart throbbed as if stifling her; but it was only for a moment, and then she said, calmly, "Is this a stage trick, Mr. Royle?"

He looked her earnestly in the face; then he dropped her hands, and said,

quite as quietly as she could have wished, "There is no trick whatever, on my part, Miss Clevedon; I am quite as surprised as you can be."

With that, he pushed a chair towards her, which she did not take, and stood leaning against the wall, close by the window to which she had advanced.

They were both silent for a time; Silvia was looking out of the window at the sky, and Royle was gazing anxiously at her altered face. At last he drew nearer to her, and asked, in a low voice—

"Did you receive my letter, Miss Clevedon?"

"Yes; I had it some days ago," said Silvia.

"Then you did not intend to answer it," said Royle.

"Really, Mr. Royle," said Silvia, "it was a difficult letter to answer, for I hardly knew what you might be disposed to relate to me."

"Look me in the face, Silvia," said Royle, earnestly, "and tell me if you cannot guess what I should relate to you."

Silvia obeyed, she hardly knew why. She looked for a second at him; she caught the impassioned glance of his dark eyes, and she turned her head hastily towards the window.

"All that I wished to tell you may be summed up very briefly," said Royle. "I wanted you to know how deeply I have loved you ever since I have known you—how deeply I love you now."

Silvia's face was still turned from him

—he could not see the expression upon it, and he waited for an answer, for a sign of encouragement, in an agony of suspense. And, at last, finding that she did not speak, he dashed past her into Graeme's room, crying as he went—

"My dear Mr. Graeme, my time is up; I cannot stop here longer. Good day; I shall see you again soon, I dare say;" and, in a moment, a slamming of doors indicated that Royle was gone.

"Is the client who necessitated your little manœuvre dismissed?" asked Silvia, when Graeme came back into the room.

"He's been gone some time," said Graeme.

"Then, why did you not let us out immediately on his departure?" cried Silvia.

"Because I was certain that you were enjoying yourselves in your own particular way," said Graeme, tranquilly; "and I never like to interrupt a friendly chat."

"Good-bye, Mr. Graeme," said Silvia, anxious to escape from his remarks.

"Good-bye, Miss Clevedon," said Graeme. "I have been very glad to see you both; but don't make another meeting here, because it does not look well for my reputation among the clerks."

Silvia hurried away, without daring to trouble herself to answer.

CHAPTER IX.

"I AM back again, you see, Royle," cried Jocelyn, breaking into his friend's sitting-room one bright September morning.

"I am very glad to see you," replied Royle. "You are unconscionably bad-mannered at times, you know. Your frivolity lowers my tone, and your habit of dropping in here at all hours of the day and night destroys my reputation. Still, I am used to you now, and I really like to see you."

Jocelyn laughed, helped himself to a cigar, and then made his statement.

"The fact is, Royle," he said, "there's no place like London, after all, even in September. Other cities are so deucedly behind-hand in civilization; and as for the country and the seaside, Trouville, Biarritz, Scarborough, Cowes, and those kind of places, they are dreariness itself after the first week. *I* have had some excitement, it's true, because I have had such violent scenes with the Levesons. You see, Royle, they don't want to give me up, because there is no one better worth having within their reach just yet, and at the same time they cannot bear to think that a paltry idea of right and wrong should deprive them of the Clevedon property. I told them, however, that as, according to my father's will, I shall come into more money when a

son and heir is born to me, I had decided to allow Miss Clevedon's property to revert to her then. She will make good use of it, undoubtedly, and, from her own point of view, ought to take it and spread happiness and democracy over the Hampshire acres. I had some stirring wars of words with the Levesons, I can assure you, though I did not tell them that my opinions were duly set forth in the course of the legal document that is at this moment in the hands of the man of law. Of course, in our debates, noise got the better of argument. I am not a logician, and the lady of my choice would not understand me if I were. I used to think sometimes that I would give anything in the world for Miss Clevedon to be present at one of the quarrels; she would enjoy it keenly."

"Yes; I presume the sufferings of others are sport to most women," said Royle, bitterly.

"And how, if she had been allowed the free use of her tongue, she would have answered them," continued Jocelyn, not heeding his friend's remark. "They have never forgiven her for some of her speeches, and are always throwing in my face the various unfriendly observations that Miss Clevedon made respecting you before she knew much of you."

"But have you come to any agreement with these troublesome ladies?" asked Royle.

"None whatever," said Jocelyn. "They have come up to town, seeing that I was coming up to town; they are tired of Cowes, as I am tired of Cowes;

they dislike the luxurious kind of ruralizing that goes on there; and—— Upon my honour, yes, we do agree on one point: Miss Leveson and I both hate the sea, and its noise, and its waves, and its salt breeze. That perpetual whirl and whirr, as the water comes panting and springing and slapping on to the shore, is most irritating, I think. Miss Leveson says the salt air is bad for her complexion, and I'm certain that it is bad for my nerves; for that everlasting game the sea has been carrying on for hundreds of years, and will carry on for hundreds more, I suppose, exasperates me to such a pitch, that I get up every morning with a thorough determination to run back to town by the first train available. Then some one says,

'Come and play me at billiards,' and I go. Then there's lunch, and a doze over the London papers, a cigar, and a pick-me-up, and I've hardly time to stretch myself before dinner's on; and then, by Jove! I know I'm booked for another instalment of moans and splashes from 'the briny.' Some romantic young lady, to whom I expressed my sentiments on the subject, exclaimed enthusiastically, 'Oh, Mr. Jocelyn, how can you! Think of the poet's lines—

> The sea! the sea! the open sea!
> The blue, the fresh, the ever-free!'

When I informed her, however, that the poet, at the moment of writing those lines, had never seen 'the blue, the fresh, the ever-free,' she was rather taken

aback. And now, tell me what you have been doing with yourself."

"I have been playing every night; and that's about all I have to tell," said Royle. "People are out of town, so I am not overwhelmed with invitations. One man, a queer person, has followed me up, however, most pertinaciously. You remember that society to which Miss Clevedon belongs?"

Jocelyn nodded.

"One of the patrons is a man named Graeme, a Scotchman and a solicitor. It was he who asked me to read there. He knows some friends of my father's, and has gradually got intimate with my sisters, and has very frequently dined *en famille* with us on Sundays. He comes to me constantly at the theatre,

and he sends me various indications of his remembrance, in the form of paragraphs from newspapers which he thinks I may not have seen, pamphlets, hints on theatrical costume, allusions to Byron, and so on. All these attentions are supplemented by irritating references to an affection which he believes me to entertain, by disparaging comments on affection of any kind, and especially on the affection vulgarly believed to exist between husband and wife, and by satirical pins'-points that are driven into one with the greatest imperturbability. Yet, in spite of his extremely disagreeable manner as a rule, there is something in the man which one cannot help liking. There is a flash of human warmth and kindness in him every now and then,

and he is undoubtedly extremely kind when there is any need of his help. My sisters are always telling me of his good actions here, there, and everywhere; and they tell me also that he likes me exceedingly, and is most anxious to be friendly. Lately, therefore, I overlook his roughnesses and rudenesses of speech and manner, for the sake of the sterling worth beneath them. He is discouraging, however, and I should not like to have him with me on a first night."

"That's the sort of person Miss Clevedon would like," said Jocelyn.

"Miss Clevedon *does* like him excessively, I am told," said Royle; "and he appears to think that she 'came down direct from Paradise, at more than railroad speed.' Women's likes and dis-

likes, and fair speeches and abuse, are not worth much, however. They support you at one moment, only to trample on you the next."

"Quite right," said Jocelyn. "I'm glad you have come to so sensible a view of the sex. And now I must leave you, for I promised to dine at the Levesons', and I must look in at the club for letters before then. I will drop in upon you to-morrow, and tell you how I progressed in my quarrel to-night." And in a few minutes Jocelyn sauntered leisurely away.

When Royle reached his rooms that night, after the conclusion of "Marino Faliero," the landlord stepped briskly upstairs, and begged to say a few words to his illustrious tenant.

"A man-servant from Mr. Jocelyn's has been here twice this evening, sir," said he. "I told him that you would not be home till close upon eleven, and he begged that you would go round to Mr. Jocelyn's rooms, directly you returned."

"But do you know what is the matter?" asked Royle, taking up his hat again.

"Mr. Jocelyn has met with an accident, sir," the man replied, "and he wished you to be sent for."

"Good God!" exclaimed Royle, "what can have happened to poor Jocelyn? What a world this is of disasters and blunders and defeats!"

He hastened from the house, and walked quickly into Bond Street, and reached Jocelyn's luxurious chambers in

a few moments. The valet opened the door to him.

"What is the matter, Hudson?" said Royle, anxiously.

"Mr. Jocelyn was thrown from his horse this afternoon, sir," said Hudson, speaking in a whisper, "and was brought home here, and he has had three doctors to him. He's broken his collar-bone, and otherwise injured himself they say, sir; and one of them, who left last, said he was to be kept very quiet, but, all the same, he might possibly not last through the night. So I thought it best to send for Miss Leveson and Lady Leveson, in case anything should happen. Mr. Jocelyn asked for you, sir, and he asked afterwards for Miss Clevedon, and I sent to fetch her."

"Very well, very well," said Royle, quickly; and he went towards Jocelyn's bedroom.

"He's in the sitting-room, sir," said Hudson; "they laid him on the big sofa there, and he's not been moved."

So Royle turned to the sitting-room, and entered it quietly.

CHAPTER X.

The weeks succeeding her interview with Royle passed, to Silvia's mind, very quickly and very quietly. She busied herself considerably about Lucy Britton. She softened the parents' hearts, she talked to the girl herself, and had the satisfaction, finally, of knowing that Lucy was "courted" by a stalwart young workman, whom it was hoped she would eventually consent to marry. And when her mind was at rest on that score, she tried to keep her thoughts from wandering towards Royle; she tried to

keep the tones of his voice from ringing in her ears. But, in spite of her efforts, again and again she fancied she heard his eager, earnest cry, "Silvia! at last!" and she asked herself repeatedly why she had not answered his appeal. She did not know. It had come upon her so suddenly, and had aroused such a strange feeling within her own heart, that words had been impossible to her; and before she had fully realized all that his avowal meant for him and for her, and had sufficiently controlled her emotion to feel capable of speaking, Royle had gone. It was all over now, she said to herself. He was not likely to seek her again, and she hardly knew that she wished him to seek her. Her life would run on smoothly enough, and she would

have the pleasant knowledge that she had incited him to greatness, to brighten her way.

Then, in the midst of the even tenor of her existence, came one evening the messenger from Jocelyn's, saying that he had had an accident, and was not expected to live, and wished to see her. It was then ten o'clock. Silvia, of course, started immediately, and, when she reached the rooms in Bond Street, was told that Jocelyn had asked for her more than once.

It was long before she forgot her amazement when, on entering the sitting-room, she saw Lady Leveson and Miss Leveson standing by the window together. She stopped for a moment, thinking she must have made some

mistake; then she caught a glimpse of Jocelyn's face on the pillows piled on the sofa, and she forgot the Levesons entirely for a few moments.

"I have come, Gilbert, dear," she said, gently, as she bent over him.

He opened his eyes, and a faint smile quivered on his lips.

"He must be kept very quiet," said the doctor, who stood at the head of the sofa. "We are very much afraid of inflammation, and the principal thing required in such a case is perfect rest and calm. He is hardly conscious, I think, except for a moment or two at intervals, and anything which excites him might prove fatal. Perhaps you would sit down near him, madam. I believe you are the lady for whom he

has asked twice, and if he should open his eyes now and then, it will relieve him to know that you are here. May I ask you to take this seat, at all events, for a few moments, while I speak a few words to Dr. Forbes in the next room."

Without a word, with only an inclination of the head, Silvia took the chair the doctor indicated. She would have been glad to have been alone for a few moments, in order to ease her agitation by tears; but the two disdainful women standing by the window seemed to chill her very blood, and for Gilbert's sake she knew that she must control herself. So she sat perfectly still and quiet, her hands folded, her eyes bent down, her pale face looking infinitely sad and worn and thoughtful.

Her mind was busy among the happy days of her youth. She was thinking of the many games Jocelyn had played with her; the many expeditions he had shared with her; the nutting excursions, the moth-hunts, the races, the gallops, that she had enjoyed with him in the childhood they had spent together. She was thinking of the thousand and one incidents of life that are forgotten in the general rush of existence, but which crop up in the brain when a dearly loved companion is drifting slowly away, beyond our reach.

It was at this moment that the door was gently opened, and Royle entered the room. As he advanced to the sofa, Silvia looked up at him for a second, and Royle saw an indescribable some-

thing in her large, clear eyes, that made his heart beat with a faint semblance of hope. He said nothing, however, beyond asking what the doctors thought.

"They only say that he must be kept quiet," murmured Silvia. "I fancy sleep would be good for him, if he could get it."

"Amy, my dear, it is high time that *we* left this place," said Lady Leveson, in her haughtiest tone, her manner and accent grating on the susceptibilities of her hearers. "Mr. Jocelyn does not need *our* care, evidently, and if he should be allowed to require us, can send. This is not a fit place for a young lady, even when accompanied by her mother."

And, without a parting glance at Joce-

lyn, with contemptuous, angry faces, and with skirts drawn aside, lest they should touch Royle or Silvia, Lady Leveson and her daughter sailed out of the room; Amy Leveson casting a deprecating look at the handsome actor, and catching a glimpse of Sylvia's undisturbed, almost amused, expression. When the irate ladies reached Jocelyn's little smoking-room, where their cloaks and wraps had been put, Lady Leveson said to Hudson—

"Will you ask Miss Clevedon to speak to me here for a moment?"

"Oh, mamma, what is the use of making a noise now with her?" said Amy Leveson, when the man-servant had gone. "She's sure to get the best of you, because she doesn't mind what she says, and she knows Gilbert will

uphold her through thick and thin; and it makes such a ridiculous sort of scene, with Mr. Royle close at hand, too."

"My dear, she really ought to be shown how indecorously she is behaving," said Lady Leveson; while her daughter threw herself into a chair, and played with her watch-chain in evident nervousness and irritability.

"You wished to speak to me, Lady Leveson, I am told," said Silvia, as she entered the room and closed the door behind her. She stood perfectly still, confronting Lady Leveson, and she certainly did not look as if she were going to be worsted.

"To begin with, my dear Miss Clevedon," said Lady Leveson, with an assumed blandness of expression and

manner, "I was extremely surprised to see you here."

"You could not have been so surprised to see me as I was to see you," said Silvia. "It was but natural that I should come to Mr. Jocelyn's side, if he were ill or dying."

"It was also perfectly natural that my daughter should be here at such a moment," said Lady Leveson.

"Indeed!" said Silvia. "I may be dense, but I hardly see why."

"Because I have been engaged to him for some months," said Amy Leveson, irritably; "and very tired I am of it, I can tell you. We have done nothing but squabble lately; and, but for mamma, I should throw it all over."

Silvia's expression of utter surprise

showed them plainly that Jocelyn had not revealed the fact of his engagement to her.

"Undoubtedly, then," said Silvia to Miss Leveson, "your place is beside Mr. Jocelyn at such a time."

"Oh, but I'm not going back to be stuffed up in that room," said Miss Leveson. "It's so dreary sitting there; and it is so unbecoming, too, to stay up all night, and with Mr. Royle on the spot, of all the people in the world."

"Mr. Royle's only an actor, and it doesn't matter about any opinion he may have," said Lady Leveson. Then, turning to Sylvia, she began again: "I was going to say to you just now, my dear young friend, that you surely do not realize the extreme imprudence of your

behaviour in coming here alone, without your mother——"

"My mother is dead, Lady Leveson," said Silvia, curtly.

"I know, I know," resumed Lady Leveson; "I was going to add—or some married friend or relative as a chaperone. Gilbert himself may have asked for you, but of course he did not think of those things. Men are always inconsiderate."

"And in the agony almost of death, he forgot that a friend who is almost his sister ought to have a chaperone when she sees him for the last time," said Silvia, bitterly.

"As for that romantic nonsense about brothers and sisters," said Lady Leveson, sharply, "you are not Mr. Jocelyn's sister, and you cannot hold the place

of his sister. He thinks of you in anything but a fraternal manner, I can assure you."

"I should be sorry to believe that you were not mistaken," said Silvia.

"At all events," continued Lady Leveson, "whatever may be the very peculiar understanding between you and Mr. Jocelyn, the world does not know of it, and will judge of you by its own standard."

"You must surely know by this time how little I care for the opinion of the world, as generally understood," said Silvia. "What did the world say of me when it knew that I gave up my fortune, rather than consent to marry a man whom I did not love, and who did not love me? What did the world say of me when it knew, if it did ever know,

that I was living by myself in a furnished lodging, and earning my own living? I am perfectly aware that it must have formed the worst possible opinion of me, but its decisions do not affect me. I have a little knot of friends—humble friends, if you will—who would do their utmost to serve me if I needed help, who will never attack me with scandalous insinuations when my back is turned, who would not desert me if I were on my death-bed. These friends will judge me fairly enough; and the verdict of the world of fashion, of the London society world, is immaterial to me, when I think of the verdict of those who know me, and respect me, and trust me. And is that all you have to say, Lady Leveson?"

"If you do not care about your own reputation, you might at least think about Gilbert's," said Lady Leveson, severely. "What will Hudson say?"

"Hudson knows me well enough," said Silvia, "and has been down at Clevedon House with Mr. Jocelyn."

"And, after all, what will this Mr. Royle think?" said Lady Leveson again.

"You said, a few moments ago, that as Mr. Royle was only an actor, his opinion on any subject was of no consequence," returned Silvia.

"Well, that's true," said Lady Leveson; "but still Mr. Royle sees a great many persons, and might make things very unpleasant for Mr. Jocelyn, and for you also, Amy, later on. This is what comes of such indiscriminate mixing of

one's company. If Gilbert had not allowed that man Royle to fasten upon him, these unpleasant opportunities for an actor's love of scandal would have been harmless."

"Mr. Royle is a gentleman," said Silvia, "and you may be sure that you have nothing to fear from him."

"You may say what you like," said Lady Leveson; "but I am convinced that to-morrow the whole town will be ringing with the story that a young lady of respectable family has passed the night in the chambers of a young man whom she is pleased to call her brother, with a mere actor as her companion."

"Perhaps also the whole town will be ringing with the story that the young man's promised wife left his bedside, in

spite of his dangerous condition, because sitting up all night was unbecoming to her," retorted Silvia, with flashing eyes.

Lady Leveson drew her shawl round her, and as she adjusted a scarf about her neck, said, with an indescribable air of condescension, "I am only thankful, my dear young friend, that your mother and father are not alive to know all the lamentable ways into which you have fallen. How grieved and surprised the poor dear admiral would have been, had he seen and heard you to-night, and could he know of your very questionable behaviour!"

"I am certain that the admiral would have been far more grieved and surprised, could he have seen and heard how a woman of the world, who had been born

and bred in good society, had insulted me, his daughter, for no stronger apparent reason than that I had come to his adopted son, who was ill. But there is deeper ground than that for your disapproval, I know, Lady Leveson. I am poor, and the rich may do with impunity that which costs the poor a reputation. And now, I presume, I may leave you."

And, with a dignified bend of the head to her two enemies, Silvia left the room.

"I never heard of anything approaching that girl's presumption," said Lady Leveson, who could hardly restrain her anger within conventional bounds.

"I told you, you would get the worst of it," said her daughter, indifferently. "Do let us go; I am most fearfully

sleepy, and Gilbert is safe enough, depend upon it."

The ladies left, in a moment, in no enviable frame of mind; Lady Leveson desperately anxious about Jocelyn from interested motives, and Miss Leveson intensely bored by the sick-room element she was afraid she should have to endure.

When Silvia returned to the sitting-room where Jocelyn was lying, Dr. Forbes stepped forward to speak to her. It seemed at first, to her incensed imagination, as if he had been prompted by Lady Leveson; but she recognized in a moment her own injustice.

"I find, my dear young lady," he said, "that you have been unnecessarily alarmed about Mr. Jocelyn—your step-brother, I believe? There is no danger

to life, in my opinion, and undoubtedly there is no immediate danger. There is no reason for you to stop here, at all events just yet. Of course, if he should not recover himself quickly during the next week or so, then there might be ground for your taking your place at his side. As it is, I really think it will be better that he should be perfectly quiet, and I should strongly recommend you to go home and go to sleep. You look as if you needed rest, and you may be assured that you would be sent for immediately, if anything occurred that in any way indicated a change for the worse."

"I am glad to hear your reassuring account," said Silvia, "and will, under the circumstances, return home. I rely on you implicitly, however, to let me

see him again, if he should be in any danger."

As she bent over Jocelyn, he opened his eyes, and showed himself to be aware of that which was passing around him, by saying—

"Royle, you will see Silvia home."

"Indeed, there is no need of anything of the kind," said Silvia quickly to Royle. "I shall, of course, take a cab, and shall be safe enough."

"Royle had much better go with you," said Jocelyn, in a whisper. "You must let him, Silvia, if only to please me."

"You must appear, at any rate, to carry out Mr. Jocelyn's wishes," said Dr. Forbes, authoritatively. "He must not be disturbed. I shall stop here for some time."

So Silvia and Royle left the house together. They were no sooner on the pavement than Tartar came bounding towards them, springing up at Royle as well as at Silvia, and allowing Royle to stroke and pat his head—liberties which he was in the habit of resenting on the part of unsympathetic persons.

"I am evidently in your dog's good graces," said Royle to Silvia, as they stood outside Jocelyn's door.

Silvia did not answer, and seemed looking about as if for a cab; so Royle added quickly—

"You will surely walk a little way, Miss Clevedon; the night is so fine, and the air is so fresh and cool—at least, it seems to me so, accustomed as I am to the heat of the theatre. We might,

at all events, walk as far as Hanover Square. I believe there is a cab-stand there. You will have your dog to protect you, you know."

"I will walk a little with pleasure," replied Silvia.

"Will you take my arm?" said Royle.

She took his arm, and they walked on for some moments in silence, Tartar trotting contentedly at Silvia's side.

"Did you know that Miss Leveson and Mr. Jocelyn were engaged?" asked Silvia at length, feeling that the silence was intolerable, and breaking it by alluding to their mutual friend.

"Yes, Jocelyn told me of it directly we renewed our acquaintance," replied Royle. "I suppose you inferred the fact from seeing them there to-night?"

"No; Miss Leveson told me of it herself," said Silvia. "Lady Leveson confined herself chiefly to insulting allusions to me, and to my behaviour generally."

Thereupon she related to Royle the episode in Jocelyn's smoking-room.

"I am excessively sorry that Mr. Jocelyn's choice has fallen on Miss Leveson," she concluded. "She is pretty, undoubtedly, and may be amusing under certain circumstances, but she will not be the kind of wife suited to him."

"Don't be anxious about him on that score," said Royle. "I do not think he will ever marry her. He does not care for her, and the question of settlements has interfered considerably of late with their happiness. Where that is the

case, there can be little affection at the root."

Then followed another long interval of silence. They were both too agitated to talk much, and it was only when an idea suddenly struck Royle, that he exclaimed—

"Why, Miss Clevedon, you have never told me where I am to take you. I do not know where you live, remember."

"Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square," muttered Silvia, in a low tone. "But I was to take a cab, you know."

"Don't deny me the pleasure of this walk," said Royle, earnestly. "I cannot hear what you say to me in a cab, and it will be so soon over."

"But you will be back to Mr. Jocelyn the sooner," said Silvia.

"Jocelyn will not grudge me the time I spend with you," said Royle. "He knows me well; and as I am going back to pass the night at his side, the few moments of my absence will seem like a flash to him."

Silvia offered no strong resistance to his wish, and walked on at his side as if she herself were not so sorry at the turn of events. When they got into Oxford Street, and Royle knew that his time was short, he said to his companion—

"I should like to take this opportunity of telling you, Miss Clevedon, how grateful I am to you for all the good you have done me. You first encouraged me to independence and to work; you made me realize that women can be something more than toys, mere dolls,

to be admired and flattered and cast aside in moments of thought and trouble; you enabled me to bear all my father's anger and reproaches, to hear with calmness all his forebodings of dismal failure, to persevere through the months of hard study which formed me for the stage. I was elated and proud when I dared to fancy that my success would please you. In the midst of my hopes and dreams, a report of your marriage with Jocelyn struck me a heavy blow, but I bore it, strong in the determination to show you that your words had borne good fruit; and I resolved then that I would ask you, one day, to let me be your friend. Presently I heard that the marriage was a mere report, and that thought gave me renewed strength. I

was overjoyed at my own success; I was proud of my popularity; I was triumphant when the ringing cheers greeted me from all parts of the theatre on my first appearance, and I swear to you, most solemnly, that deep down in my heart was a feeling of gladness that you would know your friend had not been quite unworthy of your thoughts. From that day my fancy ran wild. I longed to meet you at some critical moment, to save you from some danger, to find you in some deep distress, that I might rescue you and restore you to health and happiness and prosperity. I would have given anything to have found you for a moment lying shivering on a doorstep, that I might have taken you to my arms and comforted you. I should have been

positively glad to see you almost drowning in the river, because I might have leapt in after you, brought you to the bank, and thus have had some claim on you for having saved your life. You know how I found you at last—how I raised my eyes from my book, in that room I shall never forget, to see you calm and serene, surrounded by the poor workwomen of your society. I might have sought you out after that night; I might have written to you, have attended the meetings at which I knew you would be present; but I did not wish to pester you, and I was afraid of the truth—I was afraid of being assured of your indifference to me. And then came that day at Graeme's place. I was as ignorant as you could have been of that which was in

store. I only know that when I saw you come in, it seemed to me that after waiting months upon months, after thinking of you—who shall say how many hours? —my chance had come at last. I need not repeat the mistake I made then; but you must let me say this: that since I may be nothing more, let me be your friend; let me see you sometimes; let me know that you are glad you helped me; let me feel that you can like me in a friendly manner—at least, as Jocelyn likes me. See, we are in your street already"—they had just entered Charlotte Street—"you have only a moment left. Speak to me now, at all events, since you did not answer the other day."

"But you did not wait for my answer, *Philip*," murmured Silvia, softly.

Royle said nothing, but drew her quickly beneath the street lamp, and looked intently at the handsome, eloquent face on which the gaslight shone. As he looked, he saw all that he wished to see in its earnest, tender expression; and then he bent forward and kissed her.

After this they walked on in silence, and parted at Silvia's door, with an exchange of good-nights and a warm, lingering pressure of hands.

CHAPTER XI.

Jocelyn mended quickly and surely. There was nothing the matter with him, he said again and again, but the doctors liked to linger about. He had simply fractured his collar-bone, and though they might have been afraid of inflamation at first, he did not, for his part, believe he could be far wrong when the bone was set. So he said day after day to Royle, looking sometimes with keen curiosity at the altered aspect his friend wore. At last, some three weeks

after his accident, when he was, to all intents and purposes, well — his only grievances being that he was somewhat weak, and that he was required to wear his arm in a sling, according to surgical routine—he said suddenly—

"Royle, the Levesons have not sent here often, have they?"

"They came the night of your accident," said Royle, "and made themselves extremely objectionable, I may remark. They have sent a maid round here once or twice since. That is all, I believe."

"They are not ill with anxiety, evidently," said Jocelyn. "And what about Miss Clevedon?"

"It would have been difficult for her to send or come," said Royle, "and I

have written to her day by day, letting her know how you get on."

"I hope you have let her know also how you were," said Jocelyn, quietly, "because she would, I believe, be grateful for the information. I can see there is something 'up,' Royle. Why don't you tell me, boldly?"

"Because you are not to be disturbed," said Royle, imperturbably.

"The doctors must drop that non-disturbance game now," said Jocelyn, "for I am going out and about, and the club-waiters won't refrain from telling me if they are short of Amontillado, because the doctors say I'm not to be disturbed. Do you believe in doctors, Royle? I don't. Why, the young one stood beside me the night of the accident,

muttering that my life hung by a thread, that I might not 'last,' that if I moved an eyelash it would be fatal; and then Forbes came in, said I was all right, told the other young fellow not to be depressing, and told me that I was to ride a quiet horse in future. Now, out with your story, Royle. It's about Miss Clevedon, of course. Has she refused you?"

"No, Jocelyn, she has not; she has accepted me," said Royle.

"What, really?" cried Jocelyn. "Are you sure of her? I'm heartily glad of it, then, and congratulate you both—upon my soul I do. So Silvia's caught at last, is she? The high and mighty one has to put her head in the dust like the commonest of mortals!"

"I don't know about putting her head in the dust," said Royle, laughing, "but she has certainly consented to marry me, and I have made her send in her resignation to her society; for she could not carry on her duties there after our marriage, and, also, it would not be reasonable for her to continue to hold a post which is not necessary to her, and might be a godsend to some one else."

"Very cleverly argued," said Jocelyn. "But, may I ask, when have you seen her?"

"I took her home the night of your accident," said Royle, "as you suggested, and when we got close to her place, I burst into the whole truth—told her the whole story."

"Come, I say," said Jocelyn, "you don't mean to insinuate that you deliberately told her you loved her, and all that sort of thing, in Charlotte Street, of all the places in the world."

"Yes; it was in Charlotte Street, just by Attenborough's," replied Royle.

"That's just like you romantic and poetic men and women," muttered Jocelyn. "You have opportunities of telling the tender story in the New Forest, or in the conservatory behind a gorgeous ball-room, or in an opera-box, or even here beside a sick-bed—what could be more effective?—and you positively select Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square! You might have had a hansom for the occasion, at all events, for the sake of your biographer; and you might

have restrained your ardour till you had passed the pawnbroker's."

While Royle was laughing at him, he began again, "But, seriously, Royle, what have you settled upon?"

"My dear fellow, I have only seen Miss Clevedon once since that eventful evening," said Royle, "and then I met her by accident in Oxford Street, and walked some way with her. But, as I tell you, I have made her resign her post. She gave a month's notice, and two weeks of the month are gone; and I made her promise me that directly you were well enough 'to be disturbed,' we should be married quietly one Saturday morning—I could be let off at the theatre for one evening—and we would run down to Richmond, and return to

London as late on Monday afternoon as would be consistent with my duties. I can't throw up my engagement, you know, for the sake of a conventional honeymoon. As to the wedding, neither Silvia nor I care about the bridesmaids and the groomsman, and the favours, and the whole preposterous show that people make. It seems to us both too serious a step for all the light-comedy business that usually goes on over it."

"What do your people say to it?" asked Jocelyn.

"I have not told them yet," said Royle. "I know, however, that my father will be only too pleased."

"But Silvia has no fortune," said Jocelyn.

"My father's ambition for me was

never a question of fortune," replied Royle. "He will be proud of Silvia's birth. We ourselves are vulgarians, as you term it; my father knows it, and will be keen in appreciating Silvia's condescension in marrying me. My sisters are out of town now, at Herne Bay. My father comes to town in the morning, and goes back at night; so I shall write and tell him of it all, and let him know that we wish it to be quietly done, and invite him, of course, to the ceremony. Sylvia can make my sisters' acquaintance when they are at home."

"That's a nineteenth-century way of doing it," said Jocelyn; then he burst into a laugh, exclaiming, "I should like to see Amy Leveson's face, if I suggested

such a style of proceeding to her. A wedding without all the pomps and vanities, the admiration, the flattery, the opportunities for adornment, the envy, and the excited stares of the multitude, which fall to the lot of the bride, would be to Miss Leveson like a Greenwich dinner without whitebait! Then, of course, you 'go in' for affection, and that makes a great difference. At all events, I am very, very glad to hear of the understanding between you both, and I shall go and see Silvia immediately."

Silvia's way had not lain all among roses since Royle's avowal. She had had his letters day by day, to strengthen her and encourage her; but even the blessed knowledge that he loved her,

and that she loved him, could not smooth away every difficulty. Her resignation of the secretary's post at the society had raised innumerable thorns to prick her. The mass of the workwomen who were members did not know she was leaving, but the men and women who attended the committee meetings knew, and had all addressed a few words of sincere regret to her, some of them venturing on a quiet smile and a bantering phrase or two. Mr. Graeme alone had not spoken to her on the subject; he had, in fact, hardly noticed her, and his stiffness and coldness had greatly hindered Silvia's happiness. She determined, however, to take the first opportunity of thawing him, if it were possible, and the opportunity came some

ten days after her resignation had been sent in. Graeme came into the office at about five o'clock in the afternoon. He was on his way home, he said, and required a prospectus of the society to show to a friend. Silvia was, as usual, alone at her desk, and Graeme, prospectus in hand, was departing with only a stiff bow, when Silvia said to him—

"If you would spare a moment or two, and would sit down here, I should very much like to say a few words to you."

He bent his head gravely, and took the seat beside the desk which she indicated.

"Mr. Graeme," she began, "you have been angry with me of late, I am sure."

"I am no connection of yours," he said, coldly, "and I have no possible

right to be pleased or displeased with you."

"Whether you have or have not a right," said Silvia, "you know that you *have* been angry. Now, I should not like to leave the society on bad terms with you, of all people in the world; and I want you to tell me frankly what I have done to offend you. Are you vexed at my resignation of my post?"

"By no means," said Graeme, loftily. "I did not expect a young and handsome woman to be chained to a desk in a dirty office, in a back street off Holborn, all her life."

"Then did you think I ought to have told you privately that I wished to leave, before giving public notice?" said Silvia, anxiously.

"I have no claim on your confidence," said Graeme. "You are at liberty to do as you like."

"But Mr. Royle will be seriously vexed if you make up your mind to be unfriendly," said Silvia, in a low voice.

"It is as I thought, then," said Graeme. "Mr. Royle *is* concerned in your determination."

"He is concerned in it to this extent," said Silvia, "that I have promised to be his wife."

"His wife? you?" exclaimed Graeme. "But have you seriously thought it over?"

"Do you think I am likely to take such a step on the strength of some foolish fancy?" asked Silvia.

"Still, an actor is different to other

men," said Graeme. "Think of the temptations that surround him, of the uncomfortable evenings you will have to pass. You can't go to the theatre with him every night, after the first month or six weeks' infatuation; and then, by-and-by, you will be jealous, and won't like to hear that the pretty women of London society idolize your husband, but would not enter a house in which his wife is received. You will grumble at him, and make his home rather uncomfortable, and he will find that he can make very pleasant friends out of doors. A popular actor can hardly make a good husband, in my opinion."

"You mean kindly enough, I have no doubt," said Silvia, who looked considerably ruffled; "but your remarks are

scarcely welcome to me, for my decision is irrevocable."

"The less said about his family the better, I believe," said Graeme.

"On that question you know more than I do," said Silvia, "for you visit his father and sisters, and I have not seen them yet. And now, Mr. Graeme, let us say no more about it. I am sorry I spoke to you to-day. When you are in a better humour, we shall perhaps understand each other better."

"I am not likely to think differently at any other time," said Graeme. "I must own that I felt rather aggrieved at your reserve in the matter. I have always had such a sincere friendship for you, that I hoped you returned it in a measure, and I was disappointed that you

did not tell me frankly why you were leaving."

"If you had given me a single opportunity, I should have told you immediately," said Silvia; "but you were so stiff and disagreeable and uncompromising, that I could hardly screw up my courage to-day to address you."

Graeme smiled while Silvia was speaking, as if she were paying him the most bewildering compliments, and then muttered that he must go, and held out his hand. Silvia gave him her hand in return, and he stood holding it, and looking in her face with his indescribable smile. At last he raised it quickly to his lips, and deliberately kissed it, then took up his papers and his hat.

"That means peace, does it not, Mr. Graeme?" said Silvia, gently.

"As you please—as you please," was his ungracious reply. "I shall always think, though, that you made a very strange choice, Miss Clevedon. He's a handsome man, it's true, and that is, I suppose, an irresistible claim on the feminine heart;" and, with those words, he left the office.

Silvia found a letter from him on her table the next morning, in which he expressed his warm friendship for her and for Royle in the kindest terms, and congratulated Silvia on having had the strength of mind to let the wealth go by, and to wait for love.

It was early one Sunday morning that Jocelyn called upon Silvia. As he entered her little sitting-room, looking quite himself again, he seized one of her

hands, and kissed her forehead, saying heartily—

"My warmest congratulations, dear; my best wishes for you both!" Then, seeing that she seemed somewhat embarrassed, he rattled on about himself, thereby giving her time to recover her self-possession. "You see, I am right enough again. I feel a trifle stiff occasionally, and have still got my arm in a sling; but that's nothing—gives me an interesting, romantic look. The doctor advises me to run down to Brighton for a few weeks and pick up my strength, and I shall take him 'at the foot of the letter,' as the French say, and go. I suppose you are glad to see me?"

"Why, of course I am," said Silvia, smiling brightly.

"And you've discovered all my iniquities, I'm told," said Jocelyn, laughingly.

"Which iniquities?" asked Silvia.

"About my Amy shallow-hearted," returned Jocelyn, "who is now, in truth, my Amy, mine no more."

"Oh, Gilbert, how can you speak of her so lightly?" said Silvia, reproachfully.

"I am not joking," said Jocelyn. "I went round to the Levesons' yesterday—saw them both—had a tremendous quarrel with them on my own account and on yours, and finally on behalf of Royle. We called each other names, of course, in a strictly gentlemanly and ladylike manner. Lady Leveson put me a straightforward question about the settle-

ments, which I answered with equal straightforwardness in an unsatisfactory sense; and then Lady Leveson said that, under the circumstances, she could not sanction her daughter's marriage. The daughter herself said she was 'sick and tired of it all,' and didn't want any further worry. Then we exchanged philanthropic wishes for each other's welfare. Something was said about presents, and I protested that nothing would induce me to allow them to be returned; and on that agreeable understanding we parted. I shall make a mental footnote to the Leveson episode in my life, and this shall be the substance of it: *Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe!* French sayings are really wonderfully concise and neat, and to the point."

"But with such sentiments, I cannot understand how you allowed yourself to become engaged to her," said Silvia.

"Well, Royle can tell you the whole story," said Jocelyn, carelessly. "He knows it all, as well as I do. I do not wish to talk about Miss Leveson, however; I want to talk about your affairs. Royle has told me all your plans—and astounding plans they are, by the way, to the ordinary mind—and he wants me to urge you to come to the point as soon as possible. He says that he has asked you to fix upon Saturday week. That will be a week after your time is up at the society's offices; and, really, Silvia, I should think that the sooner you do it, the better. You can have nothing to attract you to this place; Royle

has waited long enough to satisfy any woman's love of power, and if you do not manage the affair before his family return from the classic groves of Herne Bay, your fancy for a quiet wedding will be set at nought. Take my advice, Silvia; say Saturday next, if you write to Royle to-night. It's never too soon to be happy, you know."

Silvia did not answer, but played nervously with the fringe of the table-cloth, and in a moment Jocelyn began again.

"You are going to Jermyn Street for a time, Royle tells me?"

"He decided it all," said Silvia. "He said it would be best so, and that then we should have time to look about."

"You will be comfortable enough, of course," said Jocelyn. "I ought to be

able to speak of the attractions of the place, if any one can. The people are excruciatingly civil to Royle, and will make much of you, I expect. It's a great thing for them, naturally, to have so popular a person as Royle in their house."

Before he left, he said, seriously, "Now, Silvia, tell me frankly, there's a good girl, do you want any money?"

"No, I assure you," said Silvia. "I have spent so little, and then I have been making a little, so that I have quite enough for my present wants."

"But, my dear Silvia, there's your *trousseau?*" said Jocelyn.

"I know, I know," said Silvia, blushing brightly, to Jocelyn's great amusement.

"Upon my word, Silvia," he exclaimed, "I didn't know there was a woman left,

in the present state of the world, who could blush as you have been blushing to-day. Miss Leveson would not have condescended to blush, for any consideration."

"Perhaps it would not have shown, if she had," said Silvia.

"If you are going to abuse 'my Amy shallow-hearted,' I shall go," said Jocelyn; "in fact, I must go now, in any case. Remember to come to me, if you should at last find yourself short of money; and make the fatal day next Saturday week."

A day or two after Jocelyn's visit, Silvia summoned up her courage, and said to Mrs. Johnson, when that lady had come upstairs to take her breakfast things away—

"Mrs. Johnson, I am going to be married."

Mrs. Johnson dropped upon a chair as if she had been struck down.

"Well, I never did!" she exclaimed. "If that don't just make out my dream."

"Did you dream of me, then?" said Silvia, smiling.

"I dreamt all the street was on fire," said Mrs. Johnson, quite solemnly, "and all I could do, I couldn't get any one to go for the engines. And there was the street blazing away, and no one paying any attention; and though I ran up and down, like a wild thing, I couldn't get any one to listen to me, or to look at the fire. I said to Johnson this morning, when he was grumbling, that I should

hear some news, and now, sure enough, here it is, the first thing."

"To dream of a fire is a sign of news, then?" said Silvia, laughing, in spite of Mrs. Johnson's solemnity.

"A sign of sudden news," replied Mrs. Johnson; "and I'm sure my dream last night has turned out true enough! I told Johnson 'twould be so; but he would hardly listen to me, and said he would sooner go without the news and have a quiet night's rest. It's very sudden, isn't it, miss? And how proud Mr. Jocelyn must be, to be sure!"

"I am not going to marry Mr. Jocelyn," exclaimed Silvia.

"Not Mr. Jocelyn?" said Mrs. Johnson. "Well, this *does* make out my dream! Do I know the gentleman, miss?"

"I don't know that you can have seen him," said Silvia; "he visited my father and mother, and was intimate with us here in London at one time, but I don't think he ever came to Clevedon House. He has taken to the stage now, and I dare say you have seen or heard his name—Philip Royle."

Silvia had a definite sensation of pride in her lover at this moment, in talking of him to this poor woman, who exclaimed immediately—

"I know the gentleman's name well enough, miss, from seeing it on the posters in the streets, and in our paper of a week. Well, I'm sure I wish you every blessing and happiness in the world, and I only hope you will find people as good to you as you have been

to them. I can't say more than that, miss."

When Silvia had thanked her for her kind wishes, Mrs. Johnson inquired—

"I suppose you will leave us then, miss? Well, of course, it wouldn't be nice for you here, and I've no rooms that would do for a lady and gentleman, since my drawing-rooms are let."

"Would you like to go back to Clevedon House," said Silvia. "If you would, I am certain that I have only to say a word to Mr. Jocelyn, and he would manage it."

Mrs. Johnson's pale face flushed. "I am sure I couldn't answer before speaking to Johnson, miss, but thank you all the same for thinking of it. I will ask him when he comes home. Of course, I

should like it, in one way, for the sake of the dear children; but in another way, I've got used to London, and I like seeing a little bit of life here and there, and knowing just a something of what's going on. I should dearly like the children to go and stay there a bit, when we can afford it, certainly. But there, it's no use my saying anything before I've spoken to Johnson. When is the wedding to be, miss?"

Thereupon, Silvia entered into full explanations to her, insisting on the quietness of it all, on the ground of her mourning and her personal tastes.

Johnson expressed his views distinctly enough on the subject of a return to Clevedon, when his wife related the morning's conversation to him at tea-time.

"No; I'm not going back to the country, to serve one of your landed gentry faithfully for years, and then be turned out into the road for one slight slip. I prefer to work at my trade. I have got a regular standing now among 'em all, and the men in the yard know me and like me, and I like them. We can have our bit of chat over different things, when the day's work is done; and we can get as drunk as lords if we like, for the matter of that, and our masters don't interfere as long as we do the work well that they pay us to do. The life down there would never suit me now, and I wouldn't go right back to it, not if Miss Clevedon herself was living at the house. There! I couldn't speak plainer than that, could I? Besides, why should I

turn a poor fellow out of his place for nothing? You may depend upon it, he's quite happy and comfortable there, and it would be a blow to him and his wife and young uns, just as it was to us."

Mrs. Johnson could not help a regretful sigh, as she thought of the peace and beauty and health of that country home; of the magnificent forest land; of the picturesque street, at every house in which she had been wont to stop for a few moments' gossip; of the quiet, uneventful life, in which the budding of a plant was an incident. But she said nothing more to the purpose than—

"Dear, dear! how this day's doings do make out my dream! You see, I was right, Johnson; I said I should hear some news."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Johnson, "that if you hadn't dreamt all that—and more stupid you, for having such dreams—Miss Clevedon wouldn't have got married? But there, it's never no use trying to talk to a woman, for when a man begins to argue and prove, they begin to go on about their blessed feelings. It's high time I began to talk about my feelings too, considering the raving and plunging kind of a night's rest you let me have."

Mrs. Johnson shook her head portentously, muttering that it was all very well for him to talk, but he couldn't say but that it was very strange that things should have happened so.

CHAPTER XII.

There was a large attendance of members at the meeting of the Society for the Protection of Workwomen, convoked by Mr. Graeme for the purpose of doing honour to Silvia, on the last night of her secretaryship. The rooms were thronged; there was a buzz of talking and laughing, and wherever Silvia turned, as she walked about among the women, she saw smiling, friendly faces. The interest displayed in her was considerable. The patrons and patronesses of the society spoke to her in the kindest terms.

Mr. Graeme had told them the reason of her leaving, they said; and Silvia shrewdly suspected, by certain smiles and allusions, that he had told also, in some cases, on whom her choice had fallen.

The women's faces were specially smiling on this evening. Not that they were overjoyed at the prospect of losing Silvia, but that it had crept out among them that Silvia was going to be married, and it is undoubtedly true that the question of marriage invariably brings a light to woman's eye, a smile to woman's lip. If a marriage be announced to an assemblage of ladies, there is an instantaneous brightening of faces, and a flutter of interest goes round the circle. Grief, remorse, indifference, even despair, may be of the party, but the halo of

matrimony throws their gloomy presence into the background, and the saddest hearts are gay for a time. So there is little wonder that these poor workwomen should have forgotten their regret at Silvia's leaving the society in their interest about her wedding. They crowded about her; they told her incidents respecting their own weddings; they begged her to attend some of the society's meetings after she was married, and to bring her husband; and, finally, nearly all the women asked if they could not help her, in their stray moments, at any work she might be doing or want done.

"You are all very, very kind," said Silvia to them, again and again, "but I would not fill up your stray moments on any account." To a little knot of

women, who had formed a compact body round her, near one of the doors, she said at last, "If you like, I will leave you a work to carry on when I am gone."

"What is it?"—"We'll do it"—"Only tell us," they exclaimed one with the other, and gathering even more closely together.

"Why, I should like you to try and look after Lucy Britton, now and then," said Silvia, in a low voice. "You know, I thought she had left the society, and I found out that she had got into some trouble; and when I saw her at her mother's, she said she did not like to come back to us here, because every one would turn a cold shoulder on her. I did my best to persuade her, and I think if some of you are only a

little kind to her, she will gladly return, much sobered, I assure you."

The women, however, were not remarkably prompt in replying.

"What would become of us all," pleaded Silvia, "if we were not kind to each other in moments of trouble? Look at Mr. Hurst; do you think he would refuse to shake hands with Lucy Britton, or with any one else whom he believed to have acted wrongly? If one of you would show her some kindness, would let her feel that she is not wholly lost because of one slip, you would be doing an incalculable good. I shall see her, of course, very many times again, I hope, and I shall, I know, see you all here, time after time; but when I am not mixed up with the society day after day, as I

have been during the last ten months, it will be much more difficult for me to know the inner life of the members. Now, Mrs. Fairbairn," said Silvia, earnestly addressing herself to one particularly grave-faced woman, "won't you promise me to befriend poor Lucy Britton, if she should come among you again? No one will dream of accusing you of looking lightly at her error, and yet, if you protect her, no one will like to throw a stone at her. Just think, if you had a daughter of your own, who was in such a position, how grateful you would be to any one who would do for her what I ask you to do for Lucy."

'Well, I would be ashamed to hold back, after all you've said," Mrs. Fairbairn murmured. "I'll do my best for the poor girl, Miss Clevedon."

"You must give me your hand upon it, you know," said Silvia, with a bright smile; and after they had shaken hands warmly, Mrs. Fairbairn retired into a corner, to tell a select few of her special friends that there was a great deal of truth in all Miss Clevedon had said, and that women shouldn't be too hard upon one another.

At the end of the room, where the platform was erected when speeches were made or lectures delivered, a violent discussion of an amicable nature was going on. Mr. Graeme had made arrangements for the brewing of a startling quantity of tea, had sent in all the necessary adjuncts, such as sugar and milk, and, among other things, had ordered something like a few dozen

plum-cakes, that filled a number of dishes now standing on a side-table. Somebody had been seen to enter the room with a tray of teacups, and then the question had arisen—Should the workwomen have their songs, without which the evening would not have been deemed satisfactory, before tea or after tea?

"After tea," said Graeme, "because I'm hungry."

"Before tea," said Silvia to Graeme, "because we can't be expected to sing after eating your cakes."

"Put it to the vote," said Mr. Hurst.

Which was done, the result being that the tea was adjourned, and the singing commenced. The performance was not striking. Some of the girls had pretty

voices, and sang their songs without affectation of embarrassment or of superiority, while others, of course, were in a chronic maze as to tune and time. But the singing was a delight to them all; and the patrons and patronesses, who could hear the finest singing in the world at our opera-houses, knowing how the workwomen enjoyed this simple musical fare, enjoyed it also, and warmly applauded the singers. Finally, when some one suggested that it was already past ten o'clock, and that the tea ought to begin, the entire company sang a spirited song that had been composed in honour of the institution, and which had become the "Marseillaise" of the society, and the proceedings at the side-tables commenced.

The laughter over Mr. Graeme's tea and cake was considerable. A little fun goes a long way, fortunately, with what are termed the lower classes, and as every one seemed in particularly good spirits, the enjoyment was general. Silvia stood at one of the tables, pouring out the tea, and every now and then turning from side to side to offer cake to persons who had none; and many persons noted the bright and beaming expression of her face, and the readiness and heartiness of her laugh. Graeme was looking on, with a peculiar twinkle in his eye, and once Silvia said to him—

"Mr. Graeme, I believe you are going to play some trick on us. You are going to turn the lights out suddenly, to fire a pistol—in short, to startle us in some way,

I think, or you would not look so maliciously happy."

"I must say that I believe him to be bent on mischief," remarked one of the ladies.

"I assure you, I am only enjoying myself from a philanthropic point of view," said Graeme. "It is so pleasing to me to see Miss Clevedon's activity in dispensing that cake, and at the same time I cannot help thinking of the terrible indigestion we ought to have, presently, according to the generally accepted rules of the human organization."

The demand for tea and cake seemed to have no limit, and Silvia was leaning over the table, filling up cups, when a deafening noise of applause, of clapping

of hands, stamping of feet, and loud cries, burst from the people around her. She raised her head, and turned quickly round to see what had happened, and her eyes fell upon Philip Royle, who was standing just within the door, hat in hand, and bowing and smiling. Then she knew the meaning of Mr. Graeme's odd expression.

She turned back instantly to her duties at the tea-table, and did her best to appear unembarrassed; so that when, in a few seconds, Graeme brought Royle up to her, saying, "Mr. Royle will have a cup of tea, Miss Clevedon," she was able to answer with her accustomed ease and vivacity.

After Royle's arrival, Graeme grew irrepressible. He laughed and talked with

every one; he made himself positively agreeable to Royle; he came to Silvia's side again and again, and whispered little pleasantries into her ear; and he insinuated his remarks to the company generally so cleverly, that the whole assemblage speedily had a very fair conception of the existing understanding between Silvia and Royle. Therefore, when Silvia made a move towards taking her departure, saying that it was really very late, there was a momentary lull in the buzz of voices, and then there arose in the rooms a loud and prolonged and hearty cheer for Miss Clevedon and Mr. Royle.

Silvia and Royle stood side by side, both appearing to be profoundly touched, and Graeme leant against the wall, close by them, looking down at the ground

with a specially supercilious and impassible expression. Then all the women came one by one to shake hands with Silvia, and wish her every happiness; and Royle saw how she had a kind and appropriate word for each one of them—how she knew them by name, and knew each particular interest and predicament. It was a curious scene—one which he did not forget, and which impressed him, as deeply as anything had done, with the humane, sympathetic nature of his chosen wife.

At last it was over. The members had dispersed, the big-wigs of the society had made their pleasant speeches and were gone, and Silvia and Royle, Graeme and Hurst, left the office together. On the door-step, Graeme said to Royle—

"Of course you will see Miss Clevedon home; we are going another way."

And the party separated with a few sincere expressions of good will, and with equally sincere promises to meet again soon.

As Silvia took Royle's arm, and called to Tartar, a woman started from the shadow of the doorway adjoining the society's offices, and touched Silvia's arm.

"Why, Lucy," said Silvia, "how did you come here? Why did you not come to the meeting, you foolish girl?"

"I didn't want to come in among them," she answered, bitterly. "I heard them all laughing and cheering, and I knew they would all toss their heads at me. So I waited to speak to you when

you came out. I should like to have been present on your last evening, but I couldn't help it. Mrs. Fairbairn stopped and spoke to me just now as she left, and I have promised her to subscribe again, and be regular in attending. You'll come sometimes, won't you, Miss Clevedon?"

"Of course I shall," replied Silvia. "You don't think I am going to forget all my friends?"

"And I wanted to tell you that I have taken your advice," said Lucy, in a lower voice, "and I have told *everything* to my husband that is to be; and he was very kind, and said everybody wasn't an angel, and he didn't want to be too hard. I am so glad I've seen you; and I'm sure, although I wasn't in the room to-night,

no one can have felt more kindly in their hearts for you than I did. I shall never forget you, as long as I live."

"I hope you won't," said Silvia, smiling, in spite of the tears in her eyes; "and I hope I shall see you at the rooms there very, very many times to come. Good night, Lucy; be a good girl." And, with these words, Silvia leant forward and kissed poor Lucy's cheek, leaving her in a state of enthusiasm and pleasure beyond description.

Royle's only comment upon this scene was to raise the hand laid upon his arm to his lips with something like reverence.

CHAPTER XIII.

The day before her marriage, Silvia felt that she could not go through the long hours in the unbroken monotony of her usual daily life, and early in the afternoon, unable to bear any longer Mrs. Johnson's continual and well-meant intrusions on her solitude, she called to Tartar and went out, telling her enthusiastic and excited landlady that she would be back by tea-time.

She experienced a pleasure in going through the streets she had walked along so often in her dejection and loneliness,

and it seemed to her, as she saw the offices where she used to look for notices of vacant places, that her life had brightened gradually ever since she had known her first friend, Graeme. She recalled the various incidents of that period, and an immense gratitude to him sprang up in her heart. As she passed through the terrible gloom and squalor of St. Giles's, the place seemed transformed, so true is it that we look at the world with eyes blinded by our feelings. The streets that had appeared so sad to Silvia only a month or two back were very endurable to her on this day, when her future lay, smiling in the sunlight of a deep affection, before her. The haggard women in the doorways were not one whit more flourishing than they had been during

the past; the pale-faced, wistful-eyed children were not one whit more hopeful in their aspect than they had been throughout the previous winter and spring. The glamour that pervaded everything Silvia looked upon came from her own happiness. She walked buoyantly enough through the dismal quarter, and the keen young children who were lounging about, seeing her happy face, clamoured about her for pence, making various claims on her charity.

She reached her old haunt at last, and it seemed to her that the very Abbey had never looked so grand, so imposing, as it did then; and it was with a thorough conviction of the beauty of the world, that had sometimes seemed so dark and dreary to her, that she turned into our

Pantheon, bidding Tartar wait for her. Once within the doors, she sat down in her old place, near the stone that marks the resting-place of Charles Dickens.

She had been thinking of her mother and father continually during the past days; she had been recalling all they had ever said to her, their smallest injunctions, their lightest words, and she had tried to assure herself that they would have been satisfied with her choice. Her father had loved her, she had said to herself, although he had often been angry at what he termed her strange thoughts and fancies. She remembered how he had petted her as a child, had loved to have her trotting beside him in his country rambles, had been proud of her early distinctions and achievements; and

she was inexpressibly anxious to believe that he would eventually have approved her marriage with a man who had made his name a great one in the land, and who had something nobler than mere self-aggrandizement in view. With regard to her mother, Silvia knew that her own happiness would have been the only consideration. She was sure that the discrepancies of rank or birth, upon which some persons might have insisted, would have been overbalanced in the mother's tender heart by the fact that her daughter's happiness depended upon the sacrifice of such prejudices.

And then her thoughts turned to her lover—to her first knowledge of him, when she had mistaken his careless good humour to her pretty maid for deliberate

design—to their early talks of work and duty. She remembered, as if it had been but yesterday, his earnest face, as he spoke to her in the early morning among the ferns of the New Forest, which he was leaving. She recollected the evening spent at Mrs. Ormond's—his sudden revelation respecting his family, and the strange confusion that had overcome her when, for the only time in her life, she had danced with him. Then came the meeting on the grand staircase at Covent Garden Opera. How well she remembered his promise that she should be proud of him one day! And the day had actually come! Had she not been proud of him that night, when her listlessness and indifference were entirely dispelled by the sound of his familiar voice giving

new force to the great poet's lines? Had she not been proud of him ever since that never to be forgotten evening? Was she not proud of him now—proud that he sought her when she could bring him nothing, neither fortune nor position, when all she could bestow upon him was her deep love and appreciation? She knew that he might have chosen in many quarters; she knew that many mothers of unexceptionable family would have been glad to have secured him for their daughters; and her heart beat with emotion when she felt how deep the love must have been that had risen above all such temptations, that had lasted so long, and had betrayed itself so nobly, so manfully. As for her own love, she did not know how it had arisen. She could

not have said when it first dawned upon her; she did not understand herself. She had gone through several months, she believed, without thinking of him; then suddenly he had come abruptly before her, and from that moment to this she had thought of him continually, and had learnt to love him with all the ardour and depth of her earnest nature. And now she was so happy, that she could not help asking herself what she had done to deserve her good fortune, what she should do in the future to be worthy of it. It seemed like a satire of the fortune or chance that rules our lives, that the man on whom her section of society had looked with contempt as a *parvenu*, who had been received because of his college friends, but against whom

the daughters of good houses had been warned, should be, in a certain sense, stooping to marry her. He was not merely an actor, with a handsome presence and a telling manner; he was a man of intellect, a man of thought, a man to whom his profession was not a means of making money, but a road to a noble end. She was proud to remember the praises that had been bestowed on her lover as a man of genius.

"That is the real aristocracy," she muttered to herself; "and there, at least, people do not ask for a long pedigree or a handsome banking account. They ask of a man, 'what has he done?' In those circles, it will be thought that *he* might have looked above the secretary of a modest working-women's society." And

she felt inexpressibly proud that he had not looked above her, and wondered how she was to be worthy of her happiness. At all events, she resolved that when the property her father had left away from her were put in her keeping (Jocelyn had explained the substance of his will to her, and had forcibly impressed her as to her duty in the matter), she would do her utmost to help the poor and destitute within her reach, and to make the gap between class and class, if only a shade, narrower.

Several people passed her on their way to the body of the building, and seeing her black drapery, her bent head, and grave face, thought she was in some deep grief.

"Are you in trouble, my child?" said

a gentle, kind voice, breaking in upon her self-communion.

She looked up. A dignified, grey-headed man, his features wearing an ineffable expression of earnestness, of human sympathy, of intellectual thought, stood before her. Silvia rose in involuntary deference, and answered, as she raised her eyes to his face—

"No, sir. I am, on the contrary, so happy that I have been wondering why I should have been favoured, when there are so many suffering, unhappy people on the earth."

He looked at her keenly for a moment; then, putting his hand on her shoulder, as if to emphasize his words, said, "I think you have deserved your happiness. Enjoy it, therefore, freely and fully, and

remember that a happy human being does involuntary and ineradicable good to every one within reach. God bless you!" And then he passed out by the door near which she had been sitting.

The cheerful philosophy of the words her grave interlocutor had addressed to her seemed like a happy omen to Silvia. She thought of the incident again and again, and some years later in her life discovered by an accident that she owed those few words of encouragement to the wise and kindly spirit of one of our greatest living humanitarians.

CHAPTER XIV.

The excitement in Laurel Lodge on the first Sunday after the return of the family from Herne Bay was intense. To the casual observer, there would have seemed little cause for enthusiasm. It was certainly pleasant to be home again after a long endurance of even the most expensive lodgings on the Esplanade. The rooms were, undoubtedly, particularly comfortable; the garden looked fresh and green; the neighbours were eager to resume the card-parties, and reading-parties, and Dorcas-parties; and it was specially de-

lightful, notably to the elder sister, who superintended household matters, to have "one's own servants" again. Still, all these points did not account for the peculiar state of mind in which every occupant of the house, from the master to the maids, appeared to be. The fact was that Philip Royle was to bring his wife to his father's house, for the first time, on this special Sunday, and no words could describe the curiosity of all the members of the establishment. Mr. Royle had seen his daughter-in-law—had he not been present at the marriage, which had taken place a week before?—and, having been greatly impressed by her bearing, and her manner to himself, had returned to his daughters with an elaborate picture of her charms, which he had summed up

with the energetic statement that "she was a lady, every inch of her, and no mistake about that."

Mr. Royle's rapturous account so stirred his daughters' souls, that they were not content until he promised that they should return home in time to have Philip and his wife to dinner on the next Sunday. Then it turned out that Mr. Royle had invited Mrs. Philip Royle's adopted brother, Mr. Jocelyn, to dine; some one had suggested that Graeme should be asked; and, finally, it was found that there would be a large party at the "wholesale tea-dealer's" hospitable board.

Dinner was at five o'clock, and Royle had promised to come in good time, so that when the dreary autumn shadows crept over the house, when a sulphurous

mist began to hang about the trees, and the glimmering lights of the street-lamps that lined the road could be perceived, the eager watchers were in a distressing state of anxiety. A cheerful fire was burning in the drawing-room, and the window curtains had been drawn together, in order to shut out the unenlivening aspect; but at every sound in the road, quick hands pulled the curtains back to see if "Philip" were coming.

At last, there was no doubt about it. A vehicle was heard to stop, the gate was heard to open, and the sisters recognized their brother's laugh, and his footstep on the gravel walk. A tremor ran through the whole party when "Philip's" knock at the door woke the echoes, and then they burst into the hall in a body, utterly

forgetting the usages of good society as enforced by Julia, the married sister, and utterly unable to restrain their excitement a moment more. The servant had just opened the door, and Silvia had only time to throw back her veil, before Mr. Royle stepped forward and kissed her forehead, saying heartily—

"I'm delighted to see you here, my dear." Then he took her hand, and indicating the group of girls, said, "Here are Philip's sisters."

"And my sisters, too," said Silvia, advancing to shake hands with them one by one, and bestowing a specially bright smile upon Effie, whom she recognized.

Having divested herself of bonnet and cloak, she followed her father-in-law into the drawing-room—"for all the world like

a queen or an empress," Effie whispered to Ellen.

"Where's Dawson, Julia?" asked Royle, when the party had reassembled by the fireside.

"He's upstairs, in papa's dressing-room," said Effie. "He said he should have forty winks before your wife came, because he knew he should not sleep after he had seen her."

Silvia laughed; and while Effie, upon Royle's suggestion, had gone to wake him, Julia said stiffly—

"I must really ask you to excuse my husband sometimes for the very strange things he says, Mrs. Royle. He is so extremely plain-spoken that people might really think him rude."

"I don't think he will offend me by his frankness," said Silvia.

Julia muttered something perfectly unintelligible; and in a moment Dawson entered, and with him Graeme, whose arrival had escaped the attention of the party in the drawing-room.

"Mrs. Royle, I'm proud to meet you," said Dawson, bowing profoundly. "In fact, I may say that, with the exception of my wedding day, this is the proudest day of my life."

"Ah, but I know you City gentlemen," said Silvia, gaily. "Whenever you have a board meeting or committee meeting, you say it is the proudest day of your life, I'm told."

"Of course; one talks a lot of twaddle in the City," said Dawson.

"Yes, so I have always heard," said Silvia; "and I believe, moreover, that

some of you talk 'a lot of twaddle' out of the City!"

Graeme came forward at this moment; and Dawson informed his wife, aside, to her great displeasure, that there was a woman who could not only understand what a man said, but could give him an answer!

"Ah, Graeme, you're a sly dog," said Mr. Royle, his face beaming with delight at the turn of affairs generally. "I could hardly make my daughters believe in your duplicity, at first. Would you believe," he added, turning to Silvia, "that we never knew he was acquainted with you until Philip told it?"

"Your son mentioned Miss Clevedon twice here in my presence," said Graeme, with a grim face, "but I did not think

myself bound to say I had met the lady."

"It's best to be cautious, isn't it, Graeme?" said Dawson. "The safest plan for avoiding a noise is to mention as little as possible."

"A good maxim with which to enter upon married life," said Graeme. "You had better make a note of it, Royle."

"And what if *I* make a note of it as well?" said Silvia, good-humouredly.

"You couldn't manage it," answered Dawson. "You women can't hold your tongues. To turn to a very practical matter, though: I want to know when we are to dine, Hester? I was wound up for five, you know, and it's long past that hour. Are we waiting for any one?"

"For Mr. Jocelyn," replied Hester.

"Mr. Jocelyn? Oh, all right; but who is he? Where does he spring from?" inquired Dawson.

"He is my wife's adopted brother," said Royle.

"Of course, I remember," said Dawson; "a little, fair-haired, dandyish-looking young fellow, with a glass in one eye, and a rather foolish expression, who stood on the stairs near Miss Clevedon that night at the opera.—Why on earth are you pulling at my coat, Julia? I suppose I have said something I ought not to say. I never saw such a place; whenever you tell the truth, you put your foot in it. I'm sure I'm very sorry," he added, seeing that Silvia was laughing heartily, and that Royle was

biting his lips nervously. "I ought not to have spoken."

"You see, men cannot always hold their tongues, can they, Mr. Dawson?" said Silvia, smiling.

"Mr. Jocelyn," the maid announced at this moment, and attention was diverted from Dawson's inappropriate speech by the ceremony of introduction, which was in this case somewhat lengthy.

When Jocelyn had bowed in his most engaging manner to the young ladies, bestowing a special and admiring glance on Effie; had replied to Mr. Dawson's "Very glad to meet you," with an assurance of equal pleasure in the rencontre; and had shaken Graeme's hand cordially, saying he had often heard of him from his friend Royle, he said—

"I must apologize to every one for being rather late; but the fact is that I went round to Jermyn Street, Silvia," and he turned towards her as he spoke, "thinking that I would come up here with you."

"Very indiscreet, indeed," said Graeme, with his own peculiar smile. "You know, married couples don't want any company at all during the first week or so of their union."

"But I found you had already started," continued Jocelyn, without heeding the interruption, "and I ventured to run upstairs in order to get one of your cigars, Royle, to smoke on the way here, having, with my customary thoughtlessness, left my cigar-case at home. Of course, all that made me later than

I should have been. What a pretty piece of bronze you have on your table, Silvia!"

"On which table? Where? What do you mean?" said Silvia.

"Why, on your table at Jermyn Street," said Jocelyn. "Have you not seen it?" he asked, seeing Silvia's look of astonishment. "Some one must have sent it to you just after you left to-day. It's really an excessively pretty figure of a goddess, I suppose; at any rate, the lady has a number of implements lying about her, and is holding a shield."

"It's Minerva with her shield, which represents protection," said Graeme, inadvertently. Then, seeing that he had disclosed something of the truth, he added hastily to Silvia, "Don't thank

me for it. It's not my doing; in fact, I rather discouraged the idea than otherwise. It's an offering to you from the society. Hurst, I think, has been mainly instrumental in arranging the matter."

Which was a direct untruth on Graeme's part, for he himself had been the prime mover, had suggested the form of the gift, and had contributed a large sum towards its purchase—facts which Silvia suspected immediately, and of which she was subsequently assured.

When she had thanked him for this latest kindness, she said to him, in a low voice, aside, "I am grateful to you, indeed, for so many things, Mr. Graeme, that were I to thank you for all, I should hardly know where to begin. I have had my eyes opened to several of your

machinations; my mind is made clear on the subject of your inveigling me to Chancery Lane, not many weeks ago; and my husband assures me, and I have not doubted it, moreover, that you have been a true friend. I shall never forget all your kindness, and I shall in future believe just as much as I like of your aspersions on yourself."

"Quarrelling with Graeme, Silvia?" said her husband, advancing towards her.

"No," said Graeme; "she is paying me compliments. She wants something, I presume."

"Wants her dinner, I should think," said Dawson. "I know I do; and I'll pay you van-loads of compliments, Graeme, if you can induce the cook here to be punctual."

"A 'feast of wit and flow of soul' is not enough for you, eh, Dawson?" said Royle.

"A feast of beef and a flow of beer would be more in my style," responded Dawson, gaily.

While Jocelyn was looking and laughing in evident astonishment at the flavour of Dawson's humour, the dinner was announced.

"Now then, Marino Faliero, take in your Angiolina!" cried Dawson, in high glee.

"William, do be quiet!" said his wife, plucking at his coat-sleeve. "As if gentlemen ever took their wives in to dinner!"

"You are right, of course, my dear,"

replied Dawson. "I forgot that it might be taken as a precedent!"

"Philip and Silvia must go in together, and sit together, to-day," decreed Mr. Royle, in his off-handed, unceremonious manner; "the others can go in as they like."

He stood with Graeme at the door, and they both saw the tender glances exchanged by husband and wife, as Silvia put her hand within Royle's arm.

"It's natural that they should be together for this first time, is it not?" said Mr. Royle to Graeme, half afraid that he had transgressed all the rules of good breeding. "I am sure they would not like to be parted."

"Let us hope they may be as kindly

disposed towards each other twenty years hence!" said Graeme, as the radiant couple passed before him.

"May you be there to see!" cried Silvia.

THE END.

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